Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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POLL RESULTS

Where do you intend to celebrate New Year's Eve?

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Monday, January 2, 2012

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From New Zealand to New York, the world eagerly welcomes new year.

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British actor Russell Brand is divorcing songstress Katy Perry.

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NMI deficit at $25.8M in FY 2011

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

» Overspending by $25.241M, revenue shortfall of $565K

Gov. Benigno R. Fitial told the Legislature that the CNMI government's budget deficit—a combination of overspending mainly in the Department of Public Health and overall revenue shortfall—reached over $25.8 million in fiscal year 2011 when the budget was only $122 million.

This was a lot more than the $18.586 million deficit in fiscal year 2010.

In fiscal year 2011—from Oct. 1, 2010 to Sept. 30, 2011—total spending and other financing uses were over $147 million, "exceeding total revenues and other financing resources, closing fiscal year 2011 with a deficit in the amount of $25,806,718," Fitial said.

This, despite 16-hour work cuts, unpaid holidays and other austerity measures that the Fitial administration put in place purportedly for the government to be able to live within its means.

Fitial, in his annual report to the Legislature for fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2011, said this condition was attributed to a shortfall of $565,456 in revenue collections for the year and $25,241,262 in expenditures and obligations over amounts

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US High Court to hold first full hearing on CNMI case

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

» At issue: Compensation for interpreters

For the first time in CNMI history, a case on Saipan will finally get a full hearing at the U.S. Supreme Court. The issue: Compensation for interpreters.

The U.S. Supreme Court set for Feb. 21, 2012, an oral argument in a petition filed by Kouichi Taniguchi, a former Japanese professional baseball player who sued Kan Pacific Saipan Ltd., owner of Marianas Resort and Spa, in 2008 for alleged negligence.

CNMI attorney Douglas F. Cushnie and Washington D.C.-based lawyer Donald B. Ayer filed the petition on behalf of their client, Taniguchi, to reverse the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit's decision that favored Kan Pacific.

See COURT on Page 4

Judge nixes request to extend eligibility for CW petitions

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The federal court has denied a group of individuals' motion that seeks to extend the period during which nonresident workers would be eligible for CNMI-only transitional worker status until the court has issued a final ruling on the legality of the CW final rule.

Manglona

"Notwithstanding the balance of harms or how much the public interest would be served, given the unlikelihood that plaintiffs will succeed on

See JUDGE on Page 4

Deon is first baby of 2012

» CHC: No injuries, accidents recorded during New Year revelry

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

A bouncing baby boy who took his sweet time coming to this world is the Commonwealth's New Year baby for 2012.

Deon was born via normal delivery at 3:15am on Jan. 2 at the Commonwealth Health Center, weighing in at seven pounds and 5.3 ounces. He is the firstborn child of proud parents Hannahlei Ogarto and Derrick Sablan.

According to nurse-in-charge Annette Quiambao, Ogarto was

See DEON on Page 4

Proud parents Hannahlei Ogarto and Derrick Sablan pose with Baby Deon during a visit yesterday at the Commonwealth Health Center. The bouncing seven-pound baby boy is the CNMI's New Year baby.
MONETH G. DEPOSA

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Local

No award cuts expected for NMI Scholarship recipients

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

CNMI Scholarship Office administrator Jackie Che does not expect the financial awards of scholars to increase or decrease, at least for recipients of the spring 2012 grants.

"I do not foresee any reductions for Spring 2012 amounts, but do hope that our appropriation remains as it is, if not more, for the coming term," she told *Saipan Tribune*.

The NMI Scholarship Office has been allocated $2 million under the 2012 budget law, of which $1.1 million will go to scholars of Northern Marianas College while the remaining balance will pay for the financial awards of off-island recipients.

The NMI Scholarship Office is tasked to provide financial assistance to eligible CNMI students pursuing post-secondary education. It has two scholarship programs: the Honors program, which awards grants to honor students, and the Educational Assistance Program.

Che earlier described the $2 million budget as "not enough" but vowed to work within the allocation. She said her office is heading in the direction of giving money to students who really need it.

The scholarship board reduced the financial grants to scholars in the fall 2011 semester, resulting in a 42-percent decline in the amount of EAP awards. From previous years' $1,200 financial awards under this program, the amount was slashed to $700 per student per semester. The reduction was due to the high number of applications received for the awards.

Meantime, Che said that fall awards for off-island students remain "up to" $700.

"Award amounts are based on level of funding and number of applications we receive," she told *Saipan Tribune.*

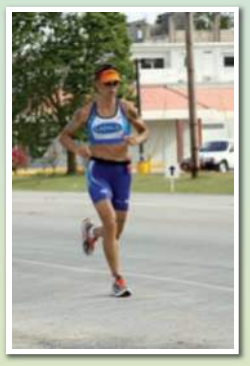
The administrator added that with the economic climate, "we are considering many options for the coming year that will stretch our scholarship awards to its fullest extent." She did not elaborate.

For the spring 2012 semester, the scholarship office received a total of 1,692 applications—slightly higher than the spring 2011 semester with 1,558 applications. Even with the current economic crunch and increasing number of applicants, Che said CNMI scholars still see the value of applying for the scholarship.

2012 Signature Events

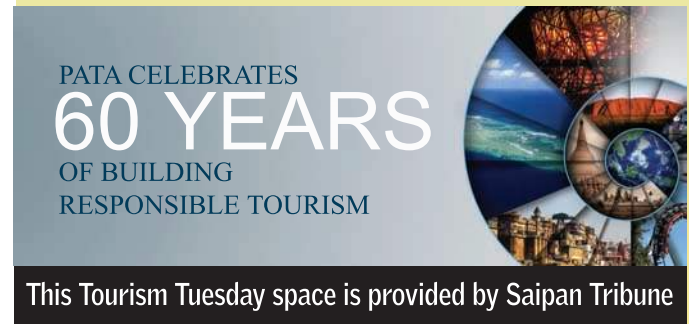
Every year, a series of Signature Events in the Northern Marianas are put on by the Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA) and its tourism partners to attract visitors and provide the local community an opportunity to actively participate in the tourism industry.

In 2012, the MVA looks forward to hosting these events:



January 28	5th Annual Marianas Coffee Trail Run
February 18-19	8th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival
March 3	7th Annual Saipan Marathon
March 24	11th Annual XTERRA Saipan Championship
March 31	23rd Annual Tagaman Triathlon
May	Tourism Month
May 5, 12, 19, 26	14th Annual Taste of the Marianas International Food Festival & Beer Garden
June 9	13th Annual Tinian Turquoise Blue Triathlon & Reef Swim
June 23	4th Annual Saipan International Open Water Flipper Race Tournament
November 10	19th Annual Rota Blue Triathlon
December 1	6th Annual Hell of the Marianas Century Cycle

Whether you join as a full competitor or participant, a volunteer, a sponsor, or a spectator, mark your calendars to join these 2012 Signature Events.



This Tourism Tuesday space is provided by Saipan Tribune

Justices find Fund liable to pay retiree's disability benefits

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The CNMI Supreme Court has affirmed the Superior Court's determination that the NMI Retirement Fund is liable to pay retiree Michael P. Cody his disability retirement annuity in the amount of 66 2/3 percent of his salary.

In agreeing with Superior Court associate judge David A. Wiseman's ruling, the high court ruled that Cody, who was a Fund member prior to enactment of Public Law 13-60, should receive disability benefits in the amount of 66 2/3 percent of his salary at the time he became disabled.

P.L. 13-60 required that a disability applicant get a written certification by two licensed physicians and a vocational rehabilitation counselor.

The high court, in its opinion issued Thursday, also vacated for lack of subject matter jurisdiction Wiseman's conclusion that the increased contribution rate is not a substantial impairment of the contractual relationship between the Fund and Cody.

The high tribunal vacated a portion of Wiseman's order that adjudicated the constitutionality of the increased contribution rate contained in Public Law 6-17. The Legislature enacted P.L. 6-17 in 1989, creating two classes of Fund members: "Class I" members, defined as persons who became members of the Fund after the enactment of the law, and "Class II" members, those who were members of the Fund prior to the enactment of the law. The law allowed Class I members to continue to contribute only 6 percent of their annual salary to the Fund but required Class II members to contribute 9 percent of their salary.

Associate Justice John A. Manglona penned the high court's opinion. Acting chief justice Alexandro C. Castro concurred. Then chief justice Miguel S. Demapan was present during oral argument but retired prior to the issuance of the opinion.

Cody, through the Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems Inc., sued the Fund, claiming that he is entitled to a disability retirement annuity from the Fund starting Dec. 31, 2007.

NMPASI counsel Jeanne Rayphand said that Cody is owed 66 2/3 percent of the salary he was receiving at the time of his separation from employment, or $40,531.

Cody was employed in March 1989 as a civil service employee of the CNMI. He is a Class II member of the Fund because he was a Fund member prior to May 7, 1989, and did not elect to become a Class I member.

In July 2007, the Fund administrator denied Cody's applications for disability retirement. Cody appealed and later sued the Fund after no decision was made on his appeal.

The Fund, through then counsel James Hollman, argued that Cody is a Class I member who has failed to meet the requirements for receiving disability.

In June 2010, Wiseman issued a ruling favorable to Cody.

Cody, however, through counsel Rayphand, appealed to the CNMI Supreme Court Wiseman's conclusion that section 8441 of P.L. 6-17, which provided that "Class II" members of the Fund must contribute 9 percent of their salary to the Fund, was not a substantial impairment of contract.

The Fund, through counsel Carolyn M. Kern, argued on cross-appeal that Wiseman erred when he awarded Cody a disability retirement annuity of 66 and two-thirds percent of his salary. Kern asserted that Cody

See JUSTICES on Next Page

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COURT

From Page 1

Taniguchi raised to the U.S. Supreme Court the question whether costs incurred in translating written documents are "compensation of interpreters."

Section 1920 of 28 U.S.C. sets out the categories of costs that may be awarded to the prevailing party in a federal lawsuit. "Compensation of interpreters" is one of the listed categories.

Guam attorney Thomas L. Roberts and Washington D.C. lawyer Dan Himmelfarb filed the opposition for their client, Kan Pacific Saipan Ltd.

The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators, a group with over 1,200 language professionals as members, filed an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) brief in support of Taniguchi.

The Interpreting and Translation Professors, a group of scholars with expertise in the language services industry, also filed an *amicus curiae* brief in support of Taniguchi.

Superior Court associate judge David A. Wiseman believes this is the first time that the U.S. Supreme Court will conduct a full hearing on a CNMI case.

Veteran lawyer Michael Dotts agrees. He said that sometime ago, the late attorney Theodore Mitchell had a case challenging the apportionment of the Commonwealth Senate that went directly from a three-judge panel of the U.S. District Court for the NMI to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"That was the first CNMI case to be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. However, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a summary affirmance so the case really did not get a full hearing," Dotts said.

Taniguchi's case filed by Cushnie, Dotts said, will be the first CNMI case to get a full hearing in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Taniguchi sued Kan Pacific over the injuries he suffered when the hotel's wooden deck he was standing on collapsed. Taniguchi used to play in Japan for the Yomiuri (Tokyo) Giants and in the U.S. for the New York Mets.

During the course of the litigation, Kan Pacific retained a document translator, Colin P.A. Jones, to translate written documents from Japanese to English.

Then U.S. District Court for the NMI chief judge Alex Munson granted Kan Pacific's cross-motion for summary judgment on Dec. 22, 2008. Munson ordered that Taniguchi shall take nothing from his complaint.

Kan Pacific then submitted a bill of costs, which requested the taxation of $5,517.20 for "compensation of interpreters." This amount included $260 that Kan Pacific had spent to compensate an interpreter, Kayoko Irinaka, during his deposition. The remaining $5,257.20 was payment made by Kan Pacific to translator Jones for his document translation services.

Munson taxed the entire amount, $5,517.20 as "compensation of interpreters."

Taniguchi appealed. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in March 2011 affirmed Munson's decision. The Ninth Circuit ruled that Taniguchi did not provide enough evidence to dispute Kan Pacific's lack of negligence.

On award of translation costs, the Ninth Circuit said the district court acted within its discretion when it awarded costs to Kan Pacific for expenses incurred to translate relevant documents.

The Ninth Circuit determined that "the word "interpreter" can reasonably encompass a "translator," both according to the dictionary definition and common usage of these terms, which does not always draw precise distinctions between foreign language interpretations involving live speech versus written documents."

Cushnie and Ayer, in Taniguchi's legal brief, asserted that the Ninth Circuit erred in ruling that document translators are "interpreters" whose compensation may be taxed under the federal law.

Cushnie and Ayer said the word "interpreter" refers to one who facilitates the comprehension of spoken proceedings by communicating content in real time during such proceedings.

"That word does not extend to one who translates written documents," the two pointed out.

In Kan Pacific's opposition to Taniguchi's petition, Roberts and Himmelfarb said the ordinary meaning of "interpreters" encompasses those who translate documents, and there is no indication that Congress intended anything other than the ordinary meaning of the statute.

JUDGE

From Page 1

the merits of their claim and the lack of irreparable harm due to the implementation of the Final Rule, the court concludes that plaintiffs have not established their entitlement to a preliminary injunction," according to Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona in her opinion and order issued Friday.

In the 17-page order, Manglona said the plaintiffs have had sufficient time to prepare for the implementation of the CW Final Rule. She said that public interest would not be served by extending the eligibility for CW status petitions for six months.

The plaintiffs' counsel, Stephen Woodruff, told *Saipan Tribune* yesterday that Manglona's decision was pretty much expected, given the high legal standard for a preliminary injunction.

Woodruff said irreparable harm—and in particular, irreparable harm to the plaintiffs—is very difficult to establish.

"Nevertheless, it is clear that the people of the CNMI—both alien and U.S. citizen—need a remedy for the botched implementation of the Subtitle A of Title VII of the Consolidated Natural Resources Act by the Department of Homeland Security, and this lawsuit will go on," said Woodruff in an email.

The lawyer said they need to study the decision and determine the best way to go forward.

The plaintiffs in this case are Bonifacio V. Sagana, Manuel T. Vilaga, Gerardo G. De Guzman, Hector T. Sevilla, Carlito J. Marquez, Eduardo M. Elenzano, and Jong Ho Lee.

The respondents are DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services District Director David Gulick, U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis, and U.S. Department of Labor District Director Terrence Trotter.

The plaintiffs' lawsuit challenges the implementation and enforcement of the CW Final Rule. Woodruff argued that the Final Rule is both procedurally and substantially defective.

Woodruff asserted that DHS' 22-month delay from the time the Interim Rule was reopened for comment until the promulgation of the Final Rule was unreasonable because it gave alien workers and their employers only 51 days after its effective date to apply for the CW program.

Manglona heard the motion last Nov. 29.

In her written ruling, Manglona said the public realistically had nearly two years of notice to plan and prepare for the implementation of the Final Rule.

"This long notice-and-comment period provided adequate time for employers to familiarize themselves with the proposed rule," Manglona said.

NMI

From Page 1

appropriated in Public Law 17-21 or the fiscal year 2011 budget law.

The governor issued the annual report to Senate President Paul Manglona (Ind-Rota) and House Speaker Eli Cabrera (R-Saipan) on the last day of submission, Dec. 31.

The $25.8-million deficit was more than the administration had earlier anticipated at $15 million to $20 million.

But the governor said there might be changes in his report's figures once auditors are done with their CNMI Single Audit for fiscal year 2011.

The Senate president, in a phone interview yesterday, said he was a "little bit surprised" that the deficit was this high, although based on previous years, the overspending was mostly a result of hospital expenditures.

"I am hoping that next year we won't see this much overspending because the Department of Public Health is now a corporation," Manglona told *Saipan Tribune*. DPH became Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. on Oct. 1, the start of fiscal year 2012.

Rep. Froilan Tenorio (Cov-Saipan) separately said yesterday he knew all along that the government will have a revenue shortfall and overspending because of the March 2011 quake and tsunami in Japan that heavily impacted CNMI tourism arrival.

Tenorio said he voted against the budget bill because he estimated that the projected revenue won't even reach $100 million, and he said the deficit of $25.8 million for fiscal year 2011 proved his point.

"So who does the governor blame now on the deficit?" he asked.

When told that overspending was mostly in the area of DPH, he said DPH was under the Executive Branch and not under the Legislature or the Judiciary.

Tenorio, a former governor and former House speaker, hopes that the revenue shortfall and overspending will help senators realize that it's "about time to pass the casino bill" to generate additional revenue, decrease the deficit, and restore the 80 hours of work biweekly among government employees.

"It's also time we realize we cannot afford to be rebating taxes when we're broke," he added.

Tenorio also said he will continue to push for the repeal of the qualifying certificate program which he said the CNMI "cannot afford anymore." The QC program provides tax incentives to certain new and existing investors.

Revenues

Fitial, in his report to the Legislature, said actual revenue collections reached only $121,434,544, or $565,456 less than projected for fiscal year 2011.

This was mainly because of a decline in business and economic activities that resulted in business gross revenue tax and income tax collections at $1,318,772 and $2,393,045 less than the respective estimates. The Fitial administration reported a shortfall of $3,334,076 for this revenue category.

However, this was partially offset by favorable collection activities in the total excise tax, liquid fuel tax, and beverage container and other tax categories. This reduced the net shortfall on the total taxes category to $2,186,077.

A minor shortfall was realized in the licenses and fees group, but charges for services netted favorably at $163,310 which was composed of $725,000 in additional hospital receipts and offset by a shortfall of $561,690 in indirect cost and customs, immigration and quarantine reimbursements, and miscellaneous charges and services. Interest income received from the Marianas Public Land trust also exceeded the estimate by $900,000.

Spending

The revised fiscal year 2011 budget was only $122 million, from $132 million. However, the government overspent by $25,241,262, resulting in total expenditures and other financing uses of over $147 million.

Total personnel spending exceeded budget allotments by $4,176,770.

Total expenditures and obligations under the "all others" category exceeded appropriations by $21,064,492, resulting in a net over expenditure/over obligation or "deficit" of $25,241,262.

Fitial said the bulk of the expenditures for the fiscal year were attributed to "excessive expenditures" in the Department of Public Health's Commonwealth Health Center operations, as well as Medical Referral, higher than normal Medicaid matching requirement.

The governor said government utility consumption also contributed to this.

This annual fiscal year report is separate from the governor's State of the Commonwealth address or report, which is requested by the Legislature.

The Senate adopted a resolution seeking a joint session with the House in February 2012 to receive the governor's SOCA, as well as Delegate Gregorio Kilili Sablan's (Ind-MP) report on federal issues impacting the CNMI. The House has yet to adopt the joint Senate resolution.

The CNMI government continues to see decline in projected revenues available for government operations. For fiscal year 2012, government budget is at $102 million, back from the budget levels more than 20 years ago.

DEON

From Page 1

admitted to the Labor and Delivery Section past 6pm on New Year's Day and Deon was successfully delivered by Dr. Helen Taro after nine hours of labor. Both mother and child are expected to be discharged anytime today.

Saipan Tribune learned that the 22-year-old Ogarto was the only patient at the hospital's Labor and Delivery Section since Dec. 31.

In a visit to the hospital, the proud parents expressed joy upon seeing their newly born son, the first child in the family.

According to Ogarto, she didn't really expect Deon to become the New Year baby but is happy that he is. Relatives, many of whom visited them yesterday, also cheered and welcomed the addition of Deon to their family.

Based on hospital records, Ogarto was supposed to give birth as early as Dec. 26 but was delayed for a few days. Records also showed that no birth was recorded on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, which made Deon the first baby born in the Commonwealth in 2012.

Excited to become a mother, Ogarto said she has nothing but good wishes for her baby. The mother works as a cashier at San Roque Market while boyfriend Derrick works at the Marianas Country Club as maintenance staff. Both parents vowed to shower their baby with much love and care. The mother described the coming of their angel as the "blessing that we've been waiting for."

Derrick is a baseball player, and like any father, he wants Deon to follow in his footsteps. "I want him to become an active athlete in the community. I wish he could also be a baseball player and if that happens, I will be the proudest dad in the world," he told *Saipan Tribune*.

Last year, baby Hannah Lee was named the 2011 New Year baby. She was also born on Jan. 2, 2011.

No injuries

The Commonwealth Health Center recorded no victims of firecracker-related incidents on Jan. 1.

Nursing supervisor Gayline Blau confirmed with *Saipan Tribune* that no untoward incident or firecracker-related injuries were recorded at the emergency room since Dec. 31.

She said the emergency unit has been ready since Friday noon to accommodate any untoward incident.

Hospital records yesterday showed zero accidents for Jan. 1 and 2. *Saipan Tribune* learned that no one has been injured for three consecutive New Years now. The last time was in 2009, when CHC registered one firecracker injury.

Nurses and hospital staff interviewed yesterday described the zero record as "good news" and an indication that people are opting to celebrate the holidays in a safe manner.

JUSTICES

From Page 3

was only entitled to a disability retirement annuity of 50 percent pursuant to Public Law 13-60.

The justices declined to consider the constitutionality of P.L. 6-17 because they held that Cody has no standing to challenge that law.

The justices vacated the portion of Wiseman's order that adjudicated the constitutionality of the increased contribution rate contained in P.L. 6-17. The justices said the issue must await a challenge by a party with proper standing.

As to P.L. 13-60, the justices held that the 50 percent disability retirement annuity contained in that law is not retroactive, and is only applicable to persons who were not yet members of the Fund on the date the law was enacted.

The justices said that persons who were members of the Fund prior to the enactment of P.L. 13-60 are entitled to a 66 2/3 percent disability retirement annuity.

Kilili: 244 agri homesteads on Rota a step closer to reality

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

A 29-page memorandum of agreement between the CNMI and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding habitat protection for the Mariana crow on Rota will allow for the release and future development of 244 agricultural homesteads on Rota, Delegate Gregorio Kilili Sablan (Ind-MP) said.

To offset the potential incidental take of the Mariana crow, an endangered species that is federally protected, 444 hectares of public land will be protected and managed as a conservation area, the delegate said.

"The CNMI government is responsible for designating land for the conservation area," Sablan said in a letter to Rep. Teresita Santos (Ind-Rota).

Sablan said the agreement will be implemented as soon as USFWS completes a biological opinion and evaluation of the National Environmental Policy Act compliance, which is expected to be completed no later than the end of January 2012.

"To prevent further delays, I suggest you encourage the appropriate CNMI officials to designate the conservation area and complete any other provisions that are their purview," Sablan added.

Sablan

Santos, in a separate letter, thanked USFWS Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office deputy regional director Richard Hannan and the delegation members for their recent visit to the CNMI and in accepting the MOA that CNMI officials executed.

She said Rota is eagerly looking forward to the finalization of the MOA in order for the CNMI Department of Public Lands and the Department of Lands and Natural Resources "to begin their tasks as required under the MOA so that the pending agricultural homestead applicants on Rota could receive lots, in additional to the initiation of the islandwide MOA for the island of Rota."

DPL proposes to release some 244 agricultural homesteads on Rota, a project that will result in the transfer of approximately 246 hectares or 608 acres of public lands to private ownership, and construction of right-of-way roads on an additional 32 hectares or 79 acres.

Another Abramoff associate with ties to NMI writes book

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

Former lobbyist Neil Volz, whose visit to the CNMI as chief of staff for former representative and convicted felon Bob Ney in 2000 was organized by former lobbyist Jack Abramoff's team, has released a book that he claims puts a human face on the business of American politics.

Volz's self-published book, *Into the Sun: A Memoir*, came a month after the release of former CNMI lobbyist Abramoff's book, *Capitol Punishment: The Hard Truth about Washington Corruption from America's Most Notorious Lobbyist.*

Volz

Abramoff, after leaving Preston Gates, later hired Volz at Greenberg Traurig. They and others' work was embroiled in the Abramoff Indian lobbying scandal and Abramoff's monetary influence. Volz reached a plea deal with the Justice Department and pleaded guilty in 2006 and testified against Abramoff associates.

Volz, as Ney's chief of staff at the time, was one of the congressional staffers who visited Tinian and Rota in 2000 to look into the islands' infrastructure needs, commit to consider funding, and make sure that CNMI representatives from Tinian and Rota will vote for then representative and future CNMI Gov. Benigno R. Fitial to become House speaker.

Volz was brought to the CNMI by Abramoff's firm, Preston Gates, along with Mike Scanlon and Brett Loper, an appropriations staffer from former representative Tom DeLay's office. Preston Gates and other lobby firms Abramoff and his men used to work for had blocked legislation federalizing CNMI immigration for almost a decade. Volz assisted in the lobbying efforts related to the CNMI.

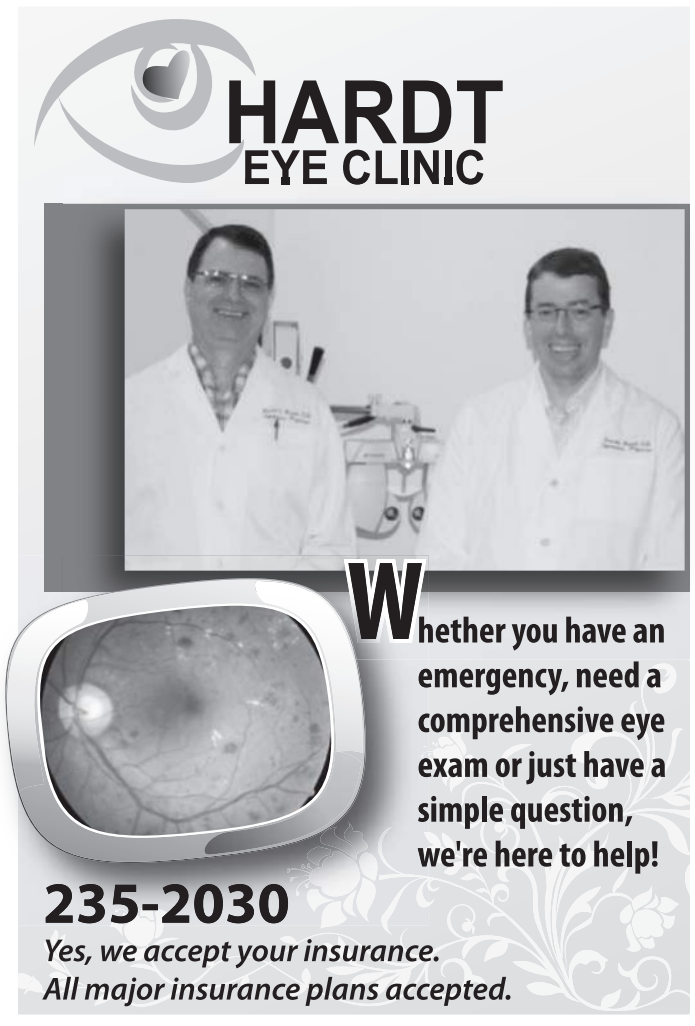
"In short order, the legislators were convinced that we could help them, and Ben [Fitial] became speaker. Immediately, our team secured the funding to conduct studies about Tinian and Rota infrastructure projects. As soon as Ben was installed as speaker of the Legislature, in January 2009, he got Teno [former CNMI governor Pedro P. Tenorio] to retain our firm," Abramoff said in his book.

Volz, according to the official website of his book, "was one of the most powerful men in Washington [D.C.] and a key player in the biggest corruption scandal since Watergate."

A former lobbyist and public official, Volz "ushers the reader in to the clandestine world of congressional deal-making and lets them experience his journey down the slippery slope of corruption. Volz outlines important life lessons he learned from the scandal. He also raises fundamental questions about the role of big money in politics. How does corruption occur? Is it an individual failure? Or the result of a failed political system?"

Florida-based human rights activist and former Rota teacher Wendy Doromal, in her blog Unheard No More, said Volz may be the one former Abramoff-connected lobbyists who actually takes responsibility for his actions.

"He appears to have turned his life around and is currently working as a homeless advocate in Fort Meyers, Florida," she said.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Yes, we accept your insurance.
All major insurance plans accepted.

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THE AFFORDABLE ANDROID PLAN FOR EVERYONE
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Christmas Sale!
MOTOROLA DEFY
$149.00* POSTPAID
Construction workers and klutzes have reason to celebrate. After demolishing numerous smartphones due to improper handling, there is finally a touchscreen handset that is not only dust and shock-proof, but water-resistant as well. With its large display and access to thousands of apps, it's certainly boredom proof. And with MOTOBLUR, you automatically receive messages or status updates, filtering what's not priority.
Samsung GALAXY PRO
$99.00* POSTPAID
Samsung Galaxy Pro features the Premium Social Hub, Google Services and Android Market for the coolest and latest applications. They ensure that everything from messages to phone calls and social network updates can be achieved quickly and without hassle. The Galaxy Pro is the perfect business partner.
Samsung GALAXY Fit
$99.00* POSTPAID
Sophistication that fits right in your career path, and a sleek style that shows you still like to party. This GSM Quad-Band smartphone sports a 3" full touch screen display, Wi-Fi, 5MP Camera, and much more! With personalized homescreen & customizable widgets, your phone is as unique and interesting as your are.
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Number of Karidat clients jump by 29 percent since 2005

By CLARISSA V. DAVID
clarissa_david@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The number of clients being served by Karidat Social Services, the CNMI's premier social services arm, has jumped by almost 29 percent since 2005.

From 3,748 clients served in 2005 under the Family Services Program, this went up to 4,821 by the end of 2010, according to executive director Angie V. Guerrero.

Karidat records show that 4,044 clients were served in 2006; 4,122 in 2007; 4,386 in 2008; and 4,040 in 2009.

Guerrero noted, though, that the number of clients served in 2003 and 2004 were at 4,934 and 5,041, respectively, because they were still offering the guest worker assistance program in those two years.

Guerrero also pointed out that they have been helping more people through their Emergency Food Voucher program, with a total of 3,159 individuals assisted from 2003 to 2010.

"If they do not qualify for the voucher or if we don't have the voucher anymore, we give out from our pantry, which comes from food donated by people in the community," she told *Saipan Tribune*.

Guerrero

According to Guerrero, businesses and individuals give them food donations and she is especially pleased to see that even student groups and individual students bring them canned goods collected from food drives.

She said the National Honor Society and JROTC units do their food drives "around Thanksgiving or Christmas." Just last Thursday, Guerrero said that students from Kagman High School brought to the Karidat office in Chalan Kanoa some two cases of canned goods and about five bags of rice.

On the other hand, their Rental Assistance program allowed them to help a total of 5,331 clients, said Guerrero.

Guerrero, one of the founding members of Karidat and has been with the organization for 17 years, disclosed that they have been relying on donations from the community and applying for available federal funds to augment the budget they receive from local appropriations, which she described as not enough to pay even for the salaries of one staffer.

"We get very little share of the pie for local funds," said Guerrero, adding that they have been "frugal" in terms of expenditures for the last 10 years.

Guerrero said finances will continue to be a challenge for Karidat as they try to live within their meager budget yet still accept clients. She is thankful that many community members are still willing to help despite the tough economic climate.

"We still have very good people in our community who have big hearts," said Guerrero.

Suspected 'ice' trafficker falls

Suspected "ice" trafficker Sunzhen Lu emerges from the Superior Court's courtroom with corrections officers and a court marshal after yesterday's bail hearing.
FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Members of the Drug Enforcement Task Force arrested on Friday afternoon a suspected trafficker of methamphetamine or "ice" after a sting operation in Susupe.

Sunzhen Lu, 40, a jobless Chinese national, was arrested for one count of trafficking of a controlled substance and one count of illegal possession of a controlled substance.

At yesterday's hearing, Superior Court associate judge Joseph N. Camacho imposed a $30,000 cash bail on Lu and set the preliminary hearing on Jan. 11, 2012, at 9am.

Camacho found Lu indigent and appointed the Office of the Public Defender to serve as counsel for the defendant. Assistant public defender Douglas Hartig appeared in court. Acting chief prosecutor Peter Prestley represented the government.

Detective Steven A. Castro stated in his report that members of the Drug Enforcement Task Force and detectives of the Department of Public Safety arranged the buy-bust operation against Lu on Friday. The suspect is also known as Brada or Wei.

Castro said the officers used a "cooperating defendant" to purchase $300 worth of "ice" from Lu in front of a hardware store in Susupe at 1:39pm.

After Lu handed the "ice" to the "cooperating defendant," a marked police vehicle following by a surveillance team stopped Lu's vehicle near Mt. Carmel Church in Chalan Kanoa. The officers arrested Lu, who allegedly yielded a ziplock baggie in his jeans.

Detective Castro said the two baggies containing 0.6 gross grams of substance that were procured by the "cooperating defendant" from Lu tested positive for the presence of methamphetamine. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

Healthcare corp. backs privatization of hospital cafeteria

Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. chief executive officer Juan N. Babauta told *Saipan Tribune* that the corporation is in favor of privatizing the hospital's cafeteria, if serious proposals come in.

He said the health department had attempted to go that route years ago but opted not to pursue it after proposers submitted higher costs of operating the cafeteria compared to what the then Department of Public Health was spending.

"The cafeteria is one portion of the hospital that we're looking at privatizing. However, it will only happen if perhaps a serious vendor comes in to operate it," he said after last week's board meeting.

Babauta confirmed receiving some feelers from proposers but he labeled them as just inquiries and nothing has been formally done about the matter yet.

"But once the party interested comes to us in a more serious manner, maybe in writing a letter, I will bring that to the board for discussion and input because that is a major decision to make," he said.

The hospital cafeteria was closed to employees and non-patient customers in January last year due to lack of manpower in the kitchen section. It used to have six personnel. It now concentrates on cooking and preparing food only for hospital patients. ***(Moneth G. Deposa)***

Woman attacks husband with hot frying pan, burns shoe

A 32-year-old woman allegedly attacked her husband with a hot frying pan and burned his shoe inside their house in Garapan on Friday morning.

Carmelita Guiao was arrested for assault with a dangerous weapon, assault, and disturbing the peace. Her bail was set at $5,750 cash. Preliminary hearing is on Jan. 9, 2012.

The victim, John Saimon, sustained burn marks on his arms.

Superior Court associate judge Joseph N. Camacho presided over yesterday's bail hearing. Acting chief prosecutor Peter Prestley appeared for the government. Assistant public defender Daniel Guidotti served as counsel for the defendant.

Preliminary police investigation states that Guiao repeatedly struck Saimon with a hot frying pan. Saimon tried to protect himself with his arms. Saimon managed to take the frying pan away and asked their children to call the police.

As Guiao was talking to police officer Jason Tarkong, the fire alarm went off in the bedroom of the house. Tarkong learned that Guiao had set Saimon's shoe on fire and tried to flush the shoe down the toilet.

Tarkong smelled a strong odor of alcoholic beverages in both Saimon and Guiao. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

Northern Mariana Islands
RETIREMENT FUND
"Investing For The Future Financial Security Of Our Members"
1980

OFFICE SPACE AVAILABLE

APPROXIMATELY 14,666 SQ. FT. PRIME OFFICE SPACE

The Northern Mariana Islands Retirement Fund (NMIRF) is soliciting proposals to lease approximately 14,666 square feet of prime office space on the second and third floors (approximately 7000 sq.ft. per floor) of the Retirement Fund Building on Capitol Hill, Saipan. Ideally located across from the Governor's Office and the Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature, the building has a backup generator, 24-hour water service, and ample parking space for employees and visitors. Space is available for viewing immediately.

Minimum acceptable terms include the following:

- Per square foot per month, Triple Net (higher for less than full available footage);
- Lessee responsible for own utilities, as well as cost to separately meter;
- 24 months minimum lease term; and
- First month, last month and reasonable security deposit required (amount depends on credit history and financial strength of Lessee).

All proposals are subject to acceptance by the NMIRF Board of Trustees in its sole discretion.

/s/ RICHARD S. VILLAGOMEZ
Administrator, NMI Retirement Fund

Northern Mariana Islands
RETIREMENT FUND
"Investing For The Future Financial Security Of Our Members"
1980

PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to 1 CMC, Division 9, §9910, Governor Benigno R. Fitial and Lt. Governor Eloy S. Inos, through the NMI Retirement Fund Board of Trustees/Workers' Compensation Commission/Group Health & Life Insurance Trust Fund, are hereby giving notice that the Board of Trustees will hold its **Regular** meeting **Friday, January 06, 2012 at 1:00 p.m. at the NMI Retirement Fund Conference Room, Saipan.**

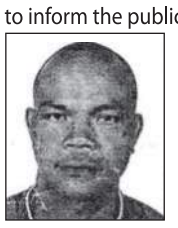
AGENDA

I. PRELIMINARY MATTERS
A. Call to Order
B. Roll Call
C. Adoption of Agenda
D. Adoption of Minutes of Meetings
1. November 09, 2011 (Emergency)
II. PUBLIC COMMENTS
III. REPORTS
A. Communications
1. Chairman/Trustees
2. Administrator/Deputy
a. Status / Updates
b. Administrative
c. Benefits
d. Member Home Loan
e. Investment / CDARS
B. Accounting
1. NMI Retirement Fund
2. GHLITF
3. WCC
C. Internal Auditor
D. Board Committees
1. Operations, Personnel & Review
2. Finance & Investment
3. Joint (F&I and OPR)
4. Special
IV. OLD BUSINESS
A. Senate Committee on Retirement
V. NEW BUSINESS
A. NMIRF Case No. 09-008
B. IFEBP Conference
C. CDARS – FICA Resolution
D. Request for Proposal
1. RFP 11-006 Office Maintenance
2. RFP 11-007 Grounds Maintenance
E. Commonwealth Government Employees Credit Union – Request Letter
VI. LEGAL MATTERS
A. Reports
1. Legal / Board Counsel
2. Administrative Hearing Officer
VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION
VIII. MISCELLANEOUS
A. Other Related Matters
B. Next Meeting
C. Adjournment

/s/ **SIXTO K. IGISOMAR**
CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the public that



Mr. EUGENIO C. SANTOS,
former Sales Representative of
Transamerica (Saipan) Corporation Grocery Wholesale
is no longer connected with our company effective **29 December 2011** and therefore not authorized to act, in any form whatsoever, on company's behalf.

If you have any question or concern, please call @ (670) 234-1629/235-8488.

PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY
CNMI GOVERNMENT

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
RFP12-DEQ-009

SUBMISSION: FEBRUARY 02, 2012 • TIME: 2:00 P.M.

"PESTICIDE SAFETY AND EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR THE DIVISION ON ENVIROMENTAL QUALITY"

THE SCOPE OF WORK FOR THIS PROJECT WILL BE AVAILABLE ON OR AFTER JANUARY 03, 2012 AT THE DEQ OFFICE OR CAN BE RECEIVED ELECTRONICALLY BY E-MAIL REQUEST TO **reinacamacho@deq.gov.mp.**

QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS PROJECT MAY BE FAXED TO MS. REINA CAMACHO (670) 664-8540 OR BY E-MAIL TO **reinacamacho@deq.gov.mp** NO LATER THAN THE CLOSE OF BUSINESS, **JANUARY 23, 2012.**

THIS IS A FEDERALLY FUNDED PROJECT; AS SUCH, LOCAL PREFERENCE ***IS NOT AVAILABLE*** BECAUSE ITS USE IS PROHIBITED BY FEDERAL LAW GRANTING FUNDING FOR THIS PROJECT.

/S/ FRANK M. RABAULIMAN
DIRECTOR, DEQ

/S/ HERMAN S. SABLAN
DIRECTOR, P&S

Award-winning Umang Glee Club wows the *man'amko*

CLARISSA V. DAVID

Umang Glee Club members flank clients at the Aging Center after their lively performance on Thursday. This is the fourth year that the group has visited the *man'amko* during the holidays. Left photo shows the Saipan Seniors Advisory Council members holding up the handmade card they prepared for Pacific Amusement general manager James Gebhard, back row holding a child, who celebrated his 55th birthday at the Aging Center last Thursday.

By CLARISSA V. DAVID
clarissa_david@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The musical and dance talents of Koblerville Elementary School's Umang Glee Club entertained clients at the Aging Center on Thursday. About 30 young members of the award-winning group performed holiday numbers for some 40 senior citizens.

Karen Alla, group co-conductor, said the students spent about two weeks preparing for their presentation that included song and dance numbers in different languages, much to the delight of the *man'amko*, who clapped and swayed to the lively music.

"I think this is our fourth year to visit them and every year, they always enjoy our performances," Alla told *Saipan Tribune*.

Alla said their annual presentation aims to inspire the island's elderly that the holiday season is about giving and sharing.

"The kids really took the time to be here and share the talents that we cultivated among the members of the Umang Glee Club. I hope we made them all happy," added Alla.

Their holiday message to the *man'amko*? "Happy New Year to all the *man'amko*. I hope they remain healthy and active and I hope we see them again next year," Alla said.

Saipan Seniors Advisory Council treasurer Christiana Michael said the Umang Glee Club did a very good job.

"The last few days, a lot of students came here and they've all done a good job but the Umang Glee Club was the best one. They all made us feel great," said Michael, who was among those who sang and danced with the students.

Michael added, "I hope they continue to nurture their talents and come back again next year. Happy New Year to them and their families."

Thursday's event also celebrated the visit of students from the International Youth Association of Japan or KSKK cultural exchange program; the birthdays of December celebrants Roberto Dela Cruz, Mila Garin, and Maxi Mereb; and the 55th birthday of Pacific Amusement Inc. general manager James Gebhard, who was thrown a surprise party at the center by his wife, Jum.

Rep. Palacios: I will take drug test this week

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
haidee_eugenio@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

More than two months since his arrest on trafficking of methamphetamine or "ice" charges, Rep. Ray Palacios (Cov-Saipan) said he will undergo drug testing during the first week of 2012.

Palacios

Palacios said the only thing that's stopping him from taking the drug test is "lack of money" for the testing. He added that he would have liked to undergo drug testing but doesn't have the extra $50 or so to do it.

"I am broke. My take home pay is only $212 after all deductions. But yes I will take the drug test [this] week," Palacios told *Saipan Tribune*.

Superior Court associate judge David A. Wiseman on Thursday found Palacios in contempt for disobeying court orders requiring him to make monthly payments in connection with a consolidated 11-year-old civil case. Palacios has many financial obligations.

House Speaker Eli Cabrera (R-Saipan) asked House members to undergo drug testing in October to help remove suspicion in anyone's mind about lawmakers, following Ray Palacios' arrest on charges of drug trafficking and alleged drug use.

As of yesterday, only nine have submitted themselves to drug testing. While most results came back "negative," other results have yet to be received. The nine included Delegate Gregorio Kilili Sablan (Ind-MP).

Three more said they will undergo drug testing: Rep. Ray Basa (Cov-Saipan), Rep. Ray Tebuteb (R-Saipan), and Rep. Tony Sablan (R-Saipan).

Besides Cabrera and Delegate Sablan, the following have also undergone drug testing since October: Floor leader George Camacho (Ind-Saipan), Rep. Teresita Santos (Ind-Rota), Rep. Ray Yumul (R-Saipan), Rep. Frank Dela Cruz (R-Saipan), Rep. Edmund Villagomez (Cov-Saipan), Rep. Joseph Palacios (R-Saipan), and Rep. Fred Deleon Guerrero (Ind-Saipan). The latter has yet to get his results back.

Rep. Froilan Tenorio (Cov-Saipan) said yesterday he will not undergo drug testing.

"Why should I need to prove to anybody that I'm not a drug addict, just because somebody was arrested on drug charges?" Tenorio asked.

Rep. Stanley Torres (Ind-Saipan) also said earlier he won't undergo drug testing, pointing out that while he is advocating for the legalization of marijuana, he doesn't use drugs.

Other House members either didn't want to comment or couldn't be reached for comment.

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation
Office of the Executive Director

INVITATION FOR BIDS
CUC-IFB-12-005

PROCUREMENT & INSTALLATION OF LED STREET LIGHTS

The Office of the Executive Director for the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified and experienced firms for the procurement and installation of Light Emitting Diodes (LED) Street Lights on Saipan, Tinian and Rota, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

This project is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy (USDOE) under the AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT (ARRA).

The Bid Packet may be obtained, upon receipt of a non-refundable payment from the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card, in the amount of $100.00 for one set; at the CUC, Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 4, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Dandan, Saipan, between 7:30 AM to 11:30 AM and 12:30 PM to 4:00 PM, Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays.

A Pre-Bid Conference will be held at 10:00 AM (ChST) on January 4, 2012 at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.10, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan.

One (1) original and Five (5) copies must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "CUC-IFB-12-005, Procurement and Installation of Light Emitting Diodes (LED) Street Lights" to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 4, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than 10:00 AM (ChST) on January 19, 2012 at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before due date and time or post-marked before submission deadline. Late submissions and conditional offers will not be considered.

A Bid Guarantee of 15 percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The security deposit may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety firm holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety or other surety acceptable to the Attorney General. A Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total proposal price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. Surety firm must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or otherwise secured in a manner satisfactory to CUC. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total proposal price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. Surety firm must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or otherwise secured in a manner satisfactory to CUC, for the protection of all persons supplying labor and material to the contractor or its subcontractors for the performance of the work provided for in the contract.

All insurers questions, concerns and qualification be should handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.

The bidder is required to submit a copy of his CNMI Business license in compliance with the Contractor's Registration and Licensing Laws of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The Contractor and all subcontractors will be obligated to pay wage rates not less than the current CNMI minimum wage, prevailing through the period of contract, as indicated in the web page – http://www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/cnmi/cnmi.htm. The contractor will also be required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws including the Davis Bacon Act.

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid or supply under the contract. The IFB does not commit CUC to award a contract, to pay any cost incurred in the preparation of the bid under this request, or to procure or contract for goods. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed as per the CUC Procurement Regulations.

All questions regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than 10:00 AM (ChST) on January 9, 2012 to Manny B. Sablan, Jr., CUC Purchasing Officer, via email manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Mr. Alfredo Palattao, Power Division Engineer via email alfred.palattao@cucgov.org and Ms. Janina Mika Muna, Administrative Assistant, Procurement & Supply via mika.muna@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal in the best interest of the government. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

/s/ ABE UTU MALAE
Executive Director

Saipan lad graduates with honors from Boise State

Matthew Owen Deleon Guerrero graduated with honors from Boise State University on Dec. 16, 2011, with a bachelor of science degree in International Relations and Geospatial Information Analysis.

During his time at Boise State University, Matthew was actively involved in the campus community. He served as president of the Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science Honor Society, was a founding member and philanthropy coordinator of Delta Upsilon International Fraternity, a founding member of the Global Affairs Association, and held leadership roles in the Boise State College Democrats and Political Science Association, among other organizations and activities.

Matthew was also very active in the off-campus community. He served as grants coordinator for Idaho Rep. Walt Minnick, field coordinator for the Idaho Victory Campaign, a Coral Reef Initiative intern with the CNMI Division of Environmental Quality, and participated in the Presidential Inaugural Conference and the International Scholar Laureate Program in China. Additionally, Matthew is an active volunteer with the International Rescue Committee where he tutors young refugee families and organized several large donation drives that gathered furniture and household goods from the Boise community and brought them to refugee households in need.

From left:, Michael, Matthew, Eve, and Ed DeLeon Guerrero. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

After graduation, Matthew is scheduled to participate in an internship with the Washington D.C. office of CNMI Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan prior to attending graduate school in the fall of 2012. Matthew previously served as speaker of the 9th CNMI Youth Congress. He graduated in 2007 from Mount Carmel High School and is the son of Edward C. and Eve O. Deleon Guerrero of Koblerville. ***(PR)***

Fiji regime says it will ease emergency controls

SUVA, Fiji (AP)—Fiji's military government will move Saturday to lift a state of emergency it imposed in 2009, as the country prepares to open consultation on a new constitution, Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama said in a New Year's message.

The Public Emergency Regulations gave police and the military extended powers, imposed tough censorship on the South Pacific nation's media and tightly controlled public assembly.

The military government of 2006 coup leader Commodore Bainimarama overturned the country's Constitution in 2009, imposing emergency rule after the nation's Court of Appeal ruled the military government was illegal.

In his statement late Sunday, Bainimarama stressed that public order would be maintained and that he would soon announce nationwide consultation for a new constitution, beginning next month, to establish a democratically elected government.

While Bainimarama gave no details of what will replace martial law, his regime has already created a media council with powers that ensure the state's continuing control over what is published.

"The (new) constitution must establish a government that is founded on an electoral system that guarantees equal suffrage, a truly democratic system based on the principal of one person, one vote, one value," he said.

"We will not have a system that will classify Fijians based on ethnicity," he said, adding that votes would be extended to 18-year-olds.

Bainimarama has broken earlier pledges to return to elections, but for the past two years has consistently claimed elections will be held in 2014.

When he seized power in a bloodless coup, Bainimarama said Fiji's ruling political classes were corrupt, and that the existing voting system was racially based to give indigenous Fijians greater voting power than the ethnic Indians who make up around 35 percent of the nation's 900,000 people.

He said Fiji had been mismanaged and hindered by greed and selfishness.

"You and I must not allow a few to dictate the destiny of our country for their own selfish needs," he repeated in his message Sunday.

Relations between Fiji and many countries have soured since Bainimarama seized power, and he has remained under heavy pressure to return Fiji to democracy.

Australia, New Zealand, the European Union and the United States have imposed sanctions and financial penalties imposed on the government. Fiji remains suspended from the British-led Commonwealth grouping of 53 nations—mainly former British colonies.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCully, a staunch critic of the military government, said Monday he "welcomes the announcement that the regulations are to be lifted and the announcement that public consultations will commence on a new constitution in February."

While "a range of steps that will be required before free and fair elections can be held, these are important moves in the right direction," he said in a statement.

"The international community will want to see these changes improve the lives and freedoms of ordinary Fijians," McCully said.

BIRTHDAY SHOUTOUT

Happy birthday to Francisco Manibusan Camacho, who is celebrating his special day today, Jan 3! No birthday cards, wishes, greetings or messages can express in words the amount of love and respect we have for you. Here's our humble attempt at giving you a very warm greeting on this special day. Happy birthday, dear Dad, and may you have a rocking year ahead. We love you! Also, happy christening to baby Kai'Po Francisco, who was baptized on Dec. 17, 2011. Greetings coming out from your loving children, grandchildren, wife and family.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Happy birthday to Vanessa Kisa! May each and every passing year bring you wisdom, peace, and cheer! May this day bring to you all things that make you smile. Whatever your dreams, big or small, may all of them be fulfilled. Happy birthday, Mommy! Greetings coming out from Shalei and Daddy.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

EIS on Futenma facility out

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Guam Delegate Madeleine Z. Bordallo was reassured by a recent announcement that the Government of Japan has delivered its Environmental Impact Statement on plans to develop a Futenma Replacement Facility in northern Okinawa. The report was delivered to the Okinawa Prefectural Government early Wednesday morning.

"The Government of Japan continues to make concrete progress toward resolving issues in developing a Futenma Replacement Facility in Okinawa," said Bordallo. "This Environmental Impact Statement is an important step forward with the realignment of Marines in Japan. These steps by the Japanese government are important to showing their efforts to resolve political impasses in Okinawa, and this important action builds on Prime Minister Noda's commitment to achieving 'tangible progress' on a Futenma Replacement Facility. I continue to work with my colleagues in Congress and officials at DOD to ensure that the U.S. fulfills its commitments under the Guam International Agreement." ***(PR)***

Flashback

A LOOK BACK AT PAST YEARS' HEADLINES

Jan. 3, 2001

CRM OKs Splash Island relocation to Smiling Cove

The Coastal Resources Management Office has approved the application of Sea Ventures Island President Anthony Pellegrino to relocate Splash Island in the vicinity of Smiling Cove Marina and Micro Beach. However, CRM Acting Director Peter Barlas said the permission to proceed with the relocation is still pending until certain conditions have been met by the company. CRM approved the planned relocation on the condition that Splash Island will be positioned to avoid interference with fishing activities in the vicinity of Smiling Cove Marina and Micro Beach Point.

CUC upgrades power supply at memorial park

Electricians will install new equipment at the American Memorial Park tomorrow, seen to ultimately help organizers plan community and tourism events at the federal park. Throughout the American Memorial Park and the adjoining block, electricity runs through both underground and overhead cables. Long-term goals put electricity underground for pedestrian safety during community events at the park. While various government and community groups continue to plan and eventually build a complete underground system, the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation this month will install switch gear that controls each section of electricity within the park and the Victoria Hotel block.

Jan. 3, 2002

CPA lines up major airport, seaport projects for 2002

The September 11 terror attacks on the United States had changed the landscape of the Northern Marianas - from a thriving resort destination to a struggling economy pained by the persisting travel scare throughout the world. Despite the economic doldrums, though, the Commonwealth Ports Authority remains optimistic that the year 2002 will bear good fruits for the agency. CPA Board Chair Roman S. Palacios said the first months of the year will, however, prove challenging since it will also usher in a new administration.

Marpi landfill project moves forward

The Division of Procurement and Supply made a final determination to award the contract for the construction of the Marpi Solid Waste Facility, as the government runs after time to put up an alternative dumpsite before Puerto Rico reaches its maximum capacity. A week after receiving the recommendation of a private evaluator, Procurement and Supply Director Herman S. Sablan decided in favor of the joint venture of Dick Pacific Corporation and Pacific Drilling Ltd. Sablan, in a notification of contract award addressed to the Public Auditor and the consortium's competitor that included the joint venture of Western Equipment Inc. and DRC Pacific Corporation, affirmed the findings of the evaluator that the DPC/PDL was a responsible contractor and, therefore, entitled to local preference.

Jan. 3, 2003

Ex-PSS employee Superior Court, NMHC, others

A retired employee of the Public School System who has suffered from brain damage has filed a lawsuit in federal court that not only seeks monetary relief from those she is suing but also seeks to test the legal system in the CNMI where both local and federal courts exist. Yonami Kochi, through lawyer Jane Mack of the Micronesian Legal Services Corp., has sued the CNMI Superior Court, Associate Judge Juan T. Lizama, the Northern Marianas Housing Corp., Triple J Saipan, Inc. and lawyer Michael White. In the civil case now with the U.S. District Court, Kochi said the defendants violated her civil rights guaranteed by the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution when Lizama signed an order that imposed a levy on her bank account that held her benefits from the NMI Retirement Fund.

Reyes: Save local businesses

Saddened by the shaky business climate that has taken its toll on some local businesses, Sen. Pete P. Reyes offered ways to save locally owned establishments by proposing to do away with volatile business policies. Before the CNMI can attract outside business investors to commit to the Northern Marianas, Reyes stressed the need to maintain the Commonwealth's existing, locally built companies. "We need to demonstrate that we are business-friendly and we take care of businesses on the island. We need to make sure that investments are sufficiently protected and we have stable policies that are not going to change every time the wind blows," Reyes told reporters yesterday

Mochitsuki Festival welcomes new year the Japanese way

By CLARISSA V. DAVID
clarissa_david@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

PDM Promoters, Inc. hosted the successful 3rd Mochitsuki Festival on Saipan last Thursday, drawing hundreds of residents and tourists alike to join in the annual celebration meant to welcome the New Year the Japanese way.

Sonia Siwa of PDM Promoters, the non-profit group that hosted the event for the first time, said that the weather was perfect and the event itself coincided with the Garapan Street Market festivities, enticing more people to take part in the celebration.

The two-hour event started at 5:30pm with the process of making *mochi*, the Japanese rice cake made of glutinous rice, pounded into a paste with a wooden mallet in a mortar before being molded into different shapes, usually small balls, and added with different flavorings.

Local and visiting Japanese—both young and old—participated in the festival as they took turns pounding the *mochi*. Samples were then distributed for the spectators to taste.

The crowd was also treated to intermission numbers from the Saipan Awaodori Team and the Green Meadow School students before and after the second *mochi*-making at about 6:30pm.

"The weather last Thursday was really perfect for the event, which is why we had more people come to the event this year and they were happy and delighted," Siwa told *Saipan Tribune*.

Siwa added that since they will be hosting the annual festival from now on, they plan to hold it along with the Garapan Street Market.

"It's a wonderful Japanese festival that welcomes the New Year so we hope to maintain the people's excitement every year," said Siwa.

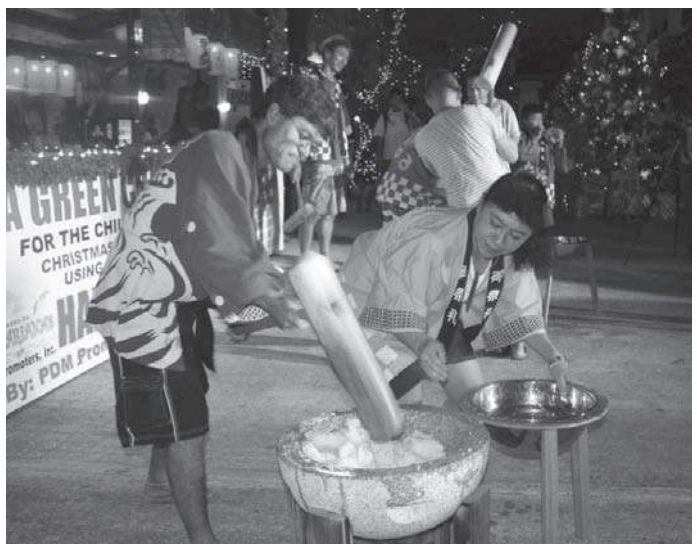
Members of the Saipan Awaodori Team gather around those pounding mochi, the Japanese rice cake made of glutinous rice, during the 3rd Mochitsuki Festival at the Paseo de Marianas in Garapan last Thursday.

Far left, local Japanese prepare the mochi for pounding.

Left, a male Japanese tourist takes his turn to pound the mochi.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

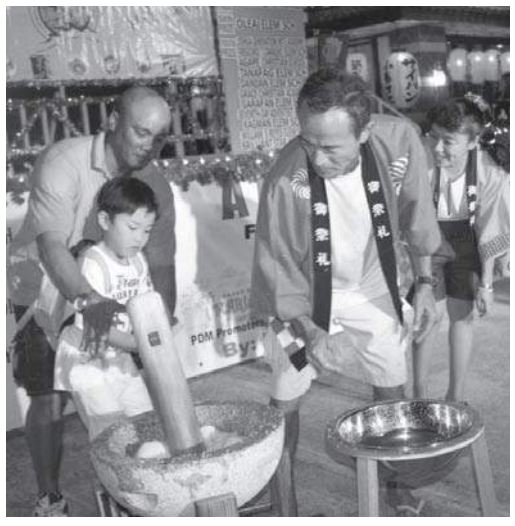
A female spectator readies to pound the mochi.



Ono Harumitsu pounds the mochi as Kinpachi Restaurant's Misako Kamato assists.

A female Japanese tourist carries the wooden mallet to pound the mochi.

Local and visiting Japanese take turns pounding the mochi.



A young boy gets assistance from an older man as he pounds the mochi with the wooden mallet.

Members of the Saipan Awaodori Team entertain the crowd.

Female members of the Saipan Awaodori Team work their Japanese fans as they dance for the festival spectators.

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
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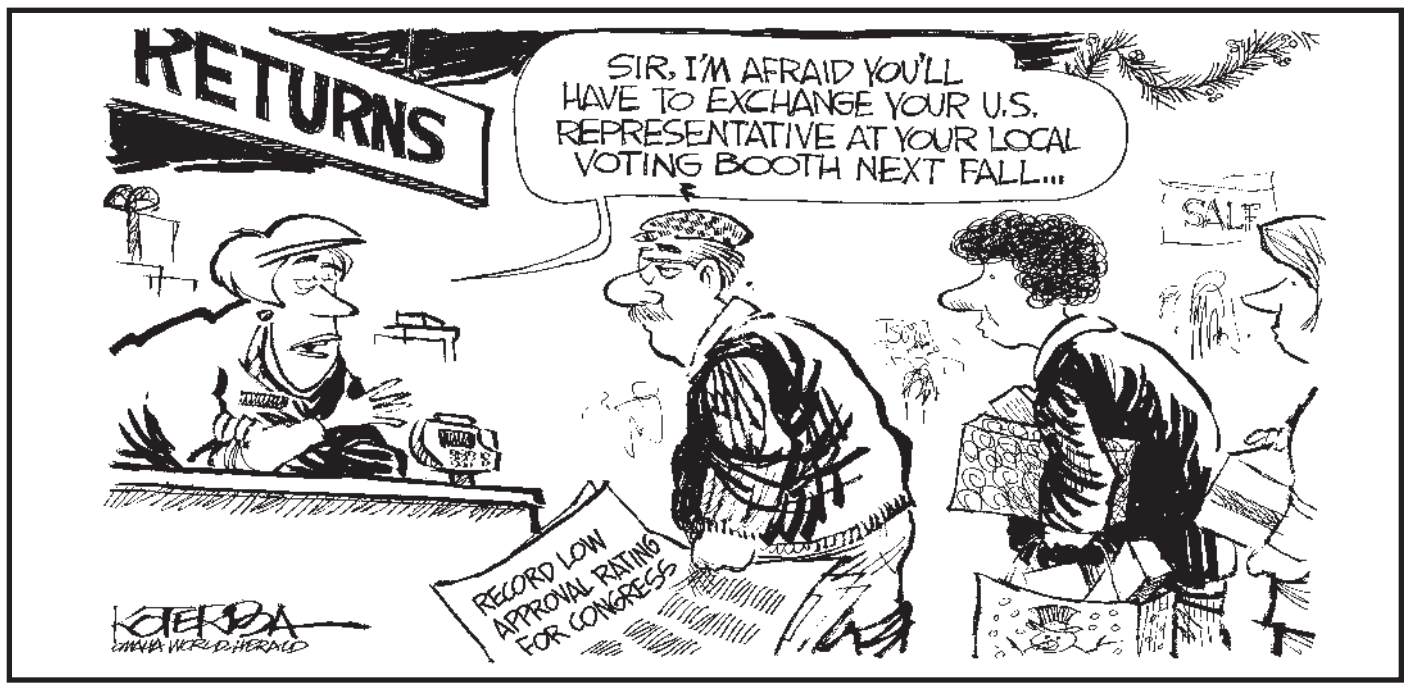
RETURNS
SIR, I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCHANGE YOUR U.S. REPRESENTATIVE AT YOUR LOCAL VOTING BOOTH NEXT FALL...
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KIERNAN
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My 2012 bowl— *j'aime la vie*

By JAIME VERGARA
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Jaime R. Vergara (jrvergarajr2031@aol.com) previously taught at San Vicente Elementary School in Saipan and is currently a guest lecturer at Shenyang Aerospace University in China.

The shaven head with the smiling face
confident in the gloomy side of shadow,
sandaled feet, sun saffron-robed body,
walks out with a begging bowl, empty.
Whatever is gathered each day
makes for nourishment, his way.

My head remains unshaven,
but my soul wears saffron.
My gait is not so steady,
but my sandals are strong.
And I, too, am out begging,
to have my bowl filled full.

What does my bowl gather?
Does what comes along
adds to what I already know?
Does the mendicant on his knee
ever does anything new?
My bowl holds my knowing and doing,
which maintain and sustain my being.

I gather memories, for sure.
They come fully accompanied
by atmospheric bewildering,
on loud and fine canvasses,
wild and angelic rendering,
of romantic misting rain,
of tears of joy and pain,
from smiling faces,
smell of earthen places,
of sounds of laughter,
brothers and sisters all.

In Zhongguo's earth, the taste of dust
delivered in amazing and assuring hugs.

When my day is done,
my bowl is filled, my soul is full,
a mortal flesh chimes on a goal.

And what is in your bowl?

In my mendicant wandering last year,
my heart awe struck and shaken,
my hopes and dreams forsaken,
my body gave way to aging,
set fleshly sashay to sagging;
while folks endured their suffering,
voices throve in melodious singing,
families had fun, kin spirits ran.

New friends in old familiar places,

See BOWL on Next Page

Year 2012: The road taken or the road not taken

By ANTHONY PELLEGRINO
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Pellegrino is a longtime businessman in the CNMI and is a former president of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce.

As the last whisper of 2011 sounded at midnight and melted into the hopeful New Year, 2012, I was reminded of one of my favorite poems by Robert Frost:

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."

As the person in the poem, you and I are standing on two roads and wondering which road we shall take. Which road shall we take to recover from our ever-worsening economic picture? As I look at one of the roads to travel down this 2012, I ask us to see the resources we possess under our feet. Our bountiful land on all the islands is waiting to be planted and harvested by us. We have acres of diamonds under our feet that we fail to see. We have markets close by who will take all and more than we can produce. And the most wonderful thing about this is that we will not add any pollution to our islands. Instead we will foster a greener environment. All of this can be done with pride and community effort while recovering from our economical depression. It's called the economics of happiness!

The Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands is blessed with so many natural resources that we have the potential of becoming a virtual food basket for Asia and other parts of the world. Think of the mountains of fruits and vegetables that Saipan, Tinian, and Rota could grow should we begin working our plows and shears. Think of all the livestock we could raise on these three islands plus the Northern Islands.

Think of the bountiful sea surrounding us that is sparking clean without pollution. Consider the multitude of fish in the bountiful sea that could be our catch. Not only do we have a clean ocean with almost unlimited fish to feed us surrounding our blessed islands, but we can also become farmers in the same waters. Think about cultivating various aquaculture species such as shrimp, abalone, groupers, tilapia, sea cucumbers, seaweed, and many other aquatic animals. All of this is well within our reach and can be done with our hands and hearts. We will be kings again.

Lying before us is another road that we are considering. So where does this other road lead us to? It leads to more dependency and more loss of pride and dignity. We become parasites. Shall we plunge into a madness called casino fever and feel that outside investors are our only saviors? Shall we continue to depend on outsiders, including the United States, to throw us any crumbs? Or shall we take the road less traveled and begin to help ourselves?

In panic we are considering a casino industry composed of foreign investors along with the usual associated businesses—more bars and more prostitution. Do we really feel that by pandering to the whims of wealthy customers we will prosper? Does it matter that our children will refuse to stay here because of no opportunities for them? Does it matter that our local workforce will remain untrained and jobless? Does it matter that we remain as beggars hoping that the foreign investors will throw crumbs at us to quiet our grudging attitude? Will we keep begging the United States for more handouts and more food stamps while whining that they aren't doing enough to help us prosper? What will happen to our pride and dignity as we travel down that road?

During the past months, I entertained several Chinese investors who visited Saipan. They marveled at Saipan with all its beauty and potential as a fruit and vegetable garden paradise. They asked me why we haven't cultivated the land to produce the fruits, vegetables, and flowers that are lying under our soil waiting to be harvested. They marveled at how clean the waters around us are. I had no reply but stood amazed that they saw so quickly what we fail to see daily.

Are we so immersed in a state of helplessness that we cannot help ourselves? Are we gripped in fear of what has happened to us? If so, let us be careful for fear inevitably brings violence in its wake.

The answer to a feeling of helplessness and fear is awareness. Once we become aware of our problems we begin to conquer. Problems arise when we don't take responsibility for what we are doing. If we want to change anything, we must increase our awareness of what we are doing. Consider carefully which road we should take.

Instead of telling us what we can do to improve our economic and social life, I am asking us to consider our attitudes toward our current problems. How did they come about? Didn't we collaborate with our leaders, perhaps unwittingly, but nevertheless, we did collaborate to create them? Aren't we part of the problems? If so, then we can undo them.

Simply put, in order to live well and happy, we must work for what we believe. We languish and die when our beliefs are gone. The famous poet Robert Browning stated: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for."

As former Supreme Court chief justice Jose S. Dela Cruz wrote recently in his letter to the editor: "Politics and the political process in the Commonwealth…have become petty, personal and vindictive over the past 30 years. …Unless our leaders begin to respect one another and the general public once again, and unless they begin to understand that public service means to serve each member of the public fairly and responsibly again, the future of the Commonwealth will continue to be bleak. …Commonwealth self-government is indeed tipping toward failure and total collapse."

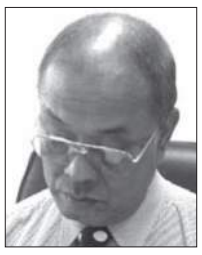
We, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands, must take action to change this course of self-destruction. Let us take the right road to prosperity. We know which road to take, but do we have the desire, determination, and courage? *Basta!* Enough is enough!

See YEAR on Next Page

2012: Gaige gi patman kanai miyu

By JOHN S. DELROSARIO JR.
Special to the Saipan Tribune

DelRosario is a regular contributor to the Saipan Tribune*'s Opinion Section.*



Maseha esta mangaige hit gi 2012, mamakat to sotta hinanau i mapos na sakan pot manmakat mampos na sapet ha pega kontra i linala'ta. Pot ihemplu: Lamegai na tolañg fuetsau ta pañot sin minalago'ta sa' mampos kohu yan bahu ha'anita.

Lastima sa' ni unu gi mansabiu puminitiye pinadesen i publiku dispues de promesan para uma-adelanta linala'ta. Namagtman sa' diberas man-paire gi madiletran "leche". Lau ti komprendyon haf' na ni unu malago gumimen lecheña. A` Saina!

■■■

I estotbu gi hinassota kulan umafuetsas saki na hinalom i nuebu na sakan. Iya monana i taimanu para tana' fanliheñg familiata na biahe. Mampos abarambau i 2011 ya gaige ha' gi tatteta i chagtpagu yan dañosu na dadalagña. Chagu' yan offresimienton "better times". Guse'ña matdision "let it be" 'nai ma-abandona i publiku gi fache' miserable na sisonyan.

I unu, kau guaha alibiu 'sino u mas chatsaga na sakan? Hafa mohon gaige gi leblon 2012? Kau i mayoria gi lehislatura yan administrasion para una' fan man-ñgañgas hit talu dañkulon tolañg sin konsentimiento-ta? Kau man-malefa na ti tatamudu i publiku ni pumadedese sumen chafleg na asuntun estomagu?

Siempre talie' hafa gaige gi kestat laimen niha na biahe. Gi finu' man-amku', "Chadegña magacha' un' dakon ke ke'yau".

■■■

Maseha muñeru, lau kase esta adumididi' ta tutuhon dumispachan ñaihon i makat na fina'pos 2011. Magahet na tat ti nina' dimu gi halom sumen aplacha' na fache' miserable. Ginen este na finaposmu, kau listu hau rumipite ' didog na chinatsaga talu na sakan?

Kau para 'in repite pat ta aregla ha'anita deste pagu maseha guaha dididi' chinatsaga gi bandata? Kau para ta sedi man-masañgane, kulan atguyau na guaka, hafa mauleg yan propiu para hita? Na ti esta talie' yan ta komprende hafa siha asuntun linahyan 'nai didog fatsu yan gueku chechu' i manma-elihe?

I plaset linala'ta gaige gi hafa ta kayun para hita yan famaguonta. Fanachu gi adeñg miyu ya in' pasensiaye u mebalua i pinadesen mimiyu pagu. Hagu ha' solu kapitan ennau na batku. Hagu un' disidi kau un' halom gi safu na puettu pat un' chansa dumisgrasiau gi halom man-dañkulun lañgat gi talulu' gi halom pipinu' na pagyu.

■■■

Mas megai siempre bisnis para u huchum pettan niha na sakan. Humuyuñg, mas menos chochu' yan kontribusion tax para i kahan iya Marianas.

Ha signifikika este na siempre debi u afuetsas higante na "austerity" ke hafa pagu gaige. Uttimoña, debi una' mana' fan para manmachochu' lamegai na empleau gobietnu 'nai esta ti siña ha kubre apas sueddu yan otru siha nesessidat.

Mampos i mamamaila' na pinadese ha estototbayu'. Rason? Lamegai na tautau para un fan mamadese deste kohun pottanmonedan familia, machule' primet guma familia ni bañku, kareta, yan mas makat na hinanau para i man-malañgu.

Ti namagof, lau estague' hu lilie' mona para pagu na sakan. Hu tatayuyot i Saina na puede lacheyu' sa' i para u famadese i lamayot patte gi publiku.

■■■

Listuyu' lokue umekuñgog hafa i man-sabiu siha para u fan maproklama na biahe. Ti nachatsaga sa' esta hu huñgog finu' niha. Taya' pagu tetehnan i para u fan huyuñg ya umachalegua siha kumonfitma i hiniñgoghu gi guinifihu. Ya sumen chatpagu yan na'mañau ayu na guinifihu!

■■■

Yangin i disposision un' saina mampos machalapun, pues makat ha establese areglu, pas yan inafamauleg gi entalu' famaguoña sa' guiya i abarambau famokatña kulan un' bulacheru. Piot ya sessu ha tulaika gima'ña. Dimas demenos yan un'umañg iya Laulau.

■■■

Makat na asuntu para megai na tautau ni man-mamadedese pagu. Ni ñgai'an 'nai siña un' dage i tautau piot gi 'nai mattu gi asuntun estomagu. Chettun ennau na pinadese gi hinasson niha ya siempre u fan man-espiha silensiu na laime para u afuetsas areglu. Magahet na ti masede adelantu gi kinalamten publiku fuera ke ayu i muñgañgañgas 'ankanu' mismu dinage deste antes.

Letters to the Editor

'We are not trying to kill the Fund'

I am writing in response to the article "Senate passes bill that will 'kill' Retirement Fund, raise taxes," published in the Dec. 29, 2011, issue of the *Marianas Variety*. As I was interviewed by both newspapers at the same time, I was quite appalled by how misleading the *Variety* article's title was.

In order to address the many issues surrounding the NMI Retirement Fund, the Senate created a special committee to work collaboratively with the Fund, its board, and the Commonwealth Retirement Association to create legislation that would better our Retirement Fund. As a result of this committee, the Senate passed with the support of the NMI Retirement Fund:

- SB 17-99, transferring administrative functions of the Government Life and Health Insurance program to the Department of Finance;
- SB 17-92 SDI, repealing the Beneficiary Derivative Lawsuit Act and suspending NMI Retirement Fund Procurement Restrictions;
- SLI-17-13 SSI, transferring disposition and management decisions of public land golf course leases to the NMI Retirement Fund;
- SLI 17-14 SD1, providing for the transfer of funds from Marianas Public Land Trust to the NMI Retirement Fund;
- SLI 17-15, allocating 25 percent of the annual revenue to the government's employer contribution to the retirement fund; and
- HB 17-226, HD1, SS1.

So, if the aforementioned legislation and all the Senate's effort are in support of the Retirement Fund, how are we trying to kill it? Furthermore, how do the Senate's amendments to HB 17-226 hurt the Retirement Fund and the CNMI in this situation?

HB 17-226, as amended by the Senate, was supported in session by: Mr. Sixto Igisomar, the NMI Retirement Fund board chairman; Mr. Richard Villagomez, the NMI Retirement Fund administrator; and Mr. Oscar Camacho, the Commonwealth Retirement Association treasurer. The substitute bill is a much needed reform measure to help both retirees and active employees.

If current employees continue to retire from the system, the benefit payouts the Fund would have to make is projected to grow from approximately $63 million to around $90 million over the next 10-15 years. The CNMI's resources have deteriorated to the point where the government is unable to satisfy the existing obligations to members of the Retirement Fund and it is unlikely that the economy will turn around fast enough for our resources to reach the level necessary for the government to meet both the existing and future obligations as more people retire.

Currently employees fear that the Retirement Fund is beyond saving and want to protect their portion of contributions and this fear is understandable. The estimated amount, if all active members exercise the options to roll over their contributions, is $113 million, $100 million of which has already been set aside by the Honorable Judge Govendo to protect active employees' contributions.

By allowing current employees the option to roll over to the defined contribution plan two things are accomplished:

1. Current employees who determine it is in their best interest to roll over can protect their contributions by exercising the option to roll over their contributions into the defined compensation plan.

2. To the extent that current employees exercise the option to roll over their contributions, future obligations of the government will be reduced. For example, if all active employees choose to roll over, benefit payouts will not increase from $63 million to around $90 million; and eventually start to decline. Under this example, approximately $130 million in accrued actuarial liabilities will be erased from the government's obligation.

There was one problem with the original HB 17-226; it lacked an appropriate funding mechanism. The current funding mechanism is based on a percentage of the wages of the working defined benefit plan members. If all defined benefit members withdraw their contributions, there will be no wages upon which to determine the government's contributions. The Senate, recognizing this deficiency, established a new funding mechanism based on a percentage of the total wages paid by each branch and agency of the government. In fact, the Senate substitute bill goes one step further by providing an additional source to fund the rollover of the employee contributions. The substitute bill reduces the rebate offset amount from 90 percent to 70 percent and the additional taxes generated will be used to help pay for the rollover of contributions and the government's unfunded liability.

Unfortunately, our Retirement Fund is in ruin and immediate measures must be taken to save it. The Senate is committed to seeing the Retirement Fund through its many issues and the passage of these bills is only the first step. Despite what the *Variety* article implies, we are not trying to kill the Fund. We are trying to save it.

Paul A. Manglona
Senate President, 17th Legislature

Neologism

A young indigenous lad was telling me in a recent encounter that he couldn't find a word in the Chamorro language for "cake." I asked him why he couldn't find such a word because he just said it. But he insisted that the English word "cake" is not a Chamorro word, therefore it is impossible for that word to be one of Chamorro origin. I emphatically responded that that is very true, but the Chamorro word for the English word "cake" is "kek." Perhaps because of my stature as an elder, the lad submitted to my suggestion but he continued to argue that I was just making up the word "kek." In response to the lad's puzzling doubt, I told him that it is true that I made up the word "kek." Is it official? Not necessarily, but it's a made-up word nonetheless. In the linguistic world, this is known as "neologism."

What is the point here? Well, the Chamorro language is just like any other language, it is not stagnant, but always evolving. This means that those agencies in the CNMI government by their jurisdictional roles involved in the preservation, perpetuation, and development of the Chamorro language should practice "neologism" to keep up with modern day demands and needs of the indigenous people. We could draw on the resources of the Chamorro Language Commission and the Indigenous Affairs Office to put a brake on the likely chance that one day our language may face a slow death of extinction and it will be difficult for it to recover its original glory. The PSS would be a benefactor of the intelligent input by efforts and contributions of experts in government agencies that have direct ownership of the responsibility over these issues.

Francisco R. Agulto
Chalan Kanoa, Saipan

BOWL

From Page 10

old friends emerged in new embraces,
painful political systems in decay,
save us from uncles, we pray,
diverse people choosing to OCCUPY,
new models of sociality to try,
classmates disremembered re-connected,
victims' lamentations and stories heard
flagrant fragrances of atrocities aired.

Ah, I've got experiences to describe,
expressed feelings, decibels for the night,
articulated thoughts complex and simple,
in awe and wonder of common encounters,
at once, devastating and full of life,
I am pretty nourished, humbled and gratified.

We heard of a manger 2000 years ago,
truthfully imagined, inspired, or so,
now we herald echoes of a distant flaring,
our universe some 14 billion years old,
truth sanctifies factual imagining,
reality embodied, plainly yet boldly told.

Light, love, life comes through
in the discordant sound of the *erku*,
accompanies the *gugong* in trance,
life's energy incarnates in dance.

Again,
empty 2012 bowl is out to gain
in another chosen time of turning,
the substance of life ever churning,
and the causes of our lives, we partake,
chances transformed, to undertake,
add the daily choices we will make,
a year-full begging bowl to contemplate,
life's being, we willfully celebrate.
Let's.

YEAR

From Page 10

Let us choose the road to success and happiness that is paved by desire, determination and discipline. Harness them and the world is ours. Looking back on our history, we tilled the land and harvested its fruits. However, in recent years, we have strayed from that course. Is it any wonder that we are lost, struggling to find our direction again?

So we stand at the two divergent roads as the New Year begins. Which road do we take—the less traveled one or the more heavily traveled one? What will we be saying somewhere ages and ages hence? Do we help ourselves or do we continue relying on others to do for us?

In closing, remember even if we don't wake up to dreams from God, every day has to mean something to us, and if it does, the battle is won. Keep smiling! It is one of our most valuable assets. May the New Year 2012 bring us the blessings we seek! Happy New Year, everyone!!!

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam Homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

The Weather

5-Day Forecast for Saipan and Tinian

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Partly cloudy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 10 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 10 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
▲86° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°

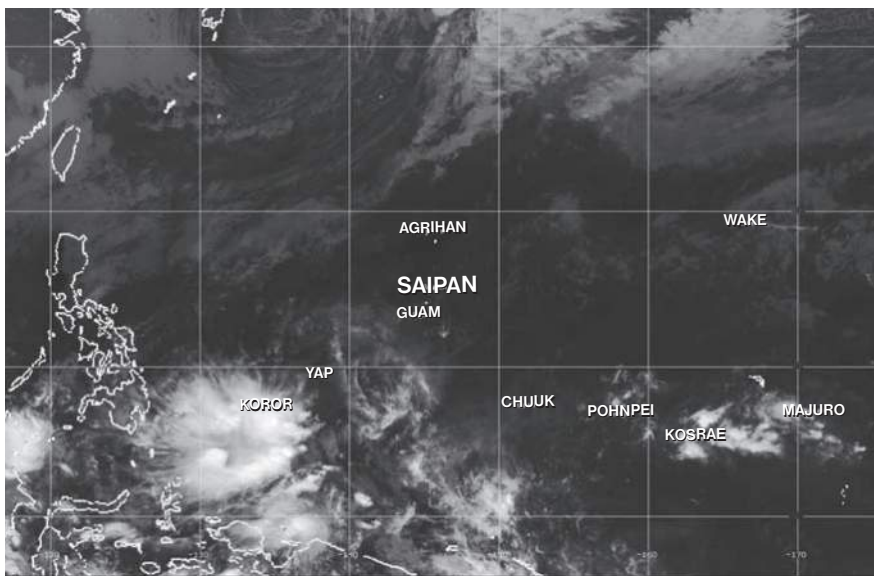
Micronesia

Guam and Rota	Thundershowers	▲85	▼78
Palau	Thunderstorms	▲86	▼79
Yap	Showers	▲86	▼78
Chuuk	Thunderstorms	▲84	▼80
Pohnpei	Showers	▲83	▼79
Kosrae	Showers	▲83	▼79
Majuro	Thunderstorms	▲85	▼80

Around The Globe

Auckland	Partly Cloudy	▲69	▼61
Beijing	Sunny	▲36	▼14
Hong Kong	Mostly Cloudy	▲64	▼55
Honolulu	Sunny	▲79	▼70
London	Showers	▲54	▼42
Los Angeles	Partly Cloudy	▲77	▼46
Manila	Thundershowers	▲85	▼75
Melbourne	Showers	▲69	▼60
Miami	Sunny	▲67	▼55
New York	Windy	▲30	▼13
Osaka	Partly Cloudy	▲48	▼38
Paris	Showers	▲51	▼41
Pusan	Sunny	▲40	▼28
Rome	Sunny	▲60	▼44
Salem	Showers	▲56	▼42
San Francisco	Partly Cloudy	▲65	▼46
Seoul	Mostly Sunny	▲30	▼19
Tokyo	Partly Cloudy	▲47	▼35
Washington, DC	Partly Cloudy	▲34	▼25

Yesterday's Satellite Image



PICTURE TIME: 1:00PM, MONDAY, JANUARY 2, 2012
Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A shear line extends northeastward across 14N130E to 20N140E then continues as a cold front to beyond 25N145E. Cloudiness and patchy rain are found along and north of this boundary to beyond 25N. A nearly-stationary front stretches southeastward from 25N153E to 23N160E then northeastward north of Wake Island to beyond 25N173E. Cloudiness and scattered showers are along and north of this boundary to beyond 25N. A near-equatorial trough runs eastward across 2N130E through a weak circulation southwest of Koror centered near 3N132E to end near EQ143E. Scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms are near Koror south of a line from 9N130E to 7N137E to EQ142E and well south of Chuuk to the south of 3N from 148E to 153E. Trade-wind convergence is producing scattered showers from Pohnpei across Kosrae to near Majuro between 9N and 4N from 157Ee to 173E.

Tides

Saipan Harbor

5:57 AM	Today	Low Tide:	0.4 Feet
12:38 PM	Today	High Tide:	1.8 Feet
7:29 PM	Today	Low Tide:	0.7 Feet
11:17 PM	Today	High Tide:	1.4 Feet

Sunrise/Sunset

Today	6:44 AM	5:59 PM
Wednesday	6:44 AM	5:59 PM
Thursday	6:44 AM	6:00 PM
Friday	6:45 AM	6:00 PM
Saturday	6:45 AM	6:01 PM

Moonrise/Moonset

Today	1:07 PM	1:18 AM
Wednesday	1:49 PM	2:07 AM
Thursday	2:34 PM	2:57 AM
Friday	3:22 PM	3:48 AM
Saturday	4:13 PM	4:40 AM

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 6, 2011

DEPARTURES

GUAM (GUM)-ROTA (ROP)			
C05062	2:10am	2:40am	1, 5
SAIPAN (SPN)-ROTA (ROP)			
C05064	4:15am	4:50am	1, 5
SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)			
C05070	4:15am	5:45am	1, 5 via ROP
C05070	4:35am	5:25am	2, 3, 4, 6, 7
C05068	8:25am	9:15am	Daily
C05074	12:10pm	1:00pm	1, 4, 5, 7
C05076	3:10pm	4:00pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05078	6:50pm	7:40pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05078	7:00pm	7:50pm	3, 6
C05072	9:55pm	10:45pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05072	10:05pm	10:55pm	3, 6
SAIPAN-NARITA (NRT)			
DL287	6:00am	8:35am	Daily
DL297	4:35pm	7:20pm	Daily
SAIPAN-SEOUL (ICN)			
OZ606	2:10am	6:00am	1
OZ606	2:40am	6:30am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
OZ604	3:20pm	7:10pm	Daily
SAIPAN-BUSAN (PUS)			
OZ608	3:35am	7:05am	4, 7
SAIPAN-GUANZHOU (CAN)			
3U8646	4:20am	7:30am	2, 6
SAIPAN-SHANGHAI (PVG)			
3U8648	6:10am	8:40am	1, 4, 5, 7
SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)			
OZ606/701	2:10am	11:15am	1 via ICN
OZ606/701	2:40am	11:15am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 via ICN
C05070/191	4:35am	9:45am	3, 6 via GUM
DL287/173	6:00am	10:25pm	Daily via NRT
C05068/183	8:25am	9:25pm	2, 5 via GUM
C05068/183	8:25am	9:40pm	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
C05076/183	3:10pm	9:25pm	2, 5 via GUM
C05076/183	3:10pm	9:40pm	1, 4, 7 via GUM
C05076/193	3:10pm	11:00pm	2, 5 via GUM-Palau
OZ604/703	3:20pm	11:00pm	Daily via ICN
C05072/PR111	9:55pm	7:50am+1	1, 5, 7 via GUM
C05072/PR111	10:05pm	7:50am+1	3, 6 via GUM
SAIPAN-HONG KONG (HKG)			
OZ606/721	2:10am	12:00pm	1 via ICN
OZ606/721	2:40am	12:00pm	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 via ICN
C05076/179	3:10pm	10:25pm	1, 5 via GUM
OZ604/723	3:20pm	10:30pm	Daily via ICN
OZ604/749	3:20pm	11:00pm	1, 3, 5, 7 via ICN

ARRIVALS

ROTA (ROP)-GUAM (GUM)			
C05064	5:15am	5:45am	1, 5
ROTA (ROP)-SAIPAN (SPN)			
C05062	3:10am	3:45am	1, 5
GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN			
C05062	2:10am	3:45am	1, 5 via ROP
C05069	2:45am	3:35am	2, 3, 4, 6, 7
C05071	7:00am	7:50am	Daily
C05073	10:05am	10:55am	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05075	1:40pm	2:30pm	1, 4, 5, 7
C05077	5:30pm	6:20pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05077	5:40pm	6:30pm	3, 6
C05079	8:35pm	9:25pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05079	8:45pm	9:35pm	3, 6
NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN			
DL298	10:25am	3:00pm	Daily
DL288	8:40pm	1:15am+1	Daily
SEOUL (ICN)-SAIPAN			
OZ603	9:00am	2:20pm	Daily
OZ605	7:40pm	1:00am+1	7
OZ605	8:10pm	1:30am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
BUSAN (PUS)-SAIPAN			
OZ607	9:00pm	2:20am+1	3, 6
GUANZHOU (CAN)-SAIPAN			
3U8645	7:40pm	3:00am+1	1, 5
SHANGHAI (PVG)-SAIPAN			
3U8647	10:40pm	5:00am+1	3, 4, 6, 7
MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN			
OZ704/603	12:10am	2:20pm	Daily via ICN
DL172/288	8:00am	1:15am+1	Daily via NRT
C0190/5077	10:55am	6:30pm	3, 6 via GUM
C0190/5079	10:55am	9:35pm	3, 6 via GUM
OZ702/605	12:30pm	1:00am+1	7 via ICN
OZ702/605	12:30pm	1:30am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 via ICN
PR110/C05071	10:15pm	7:50am+1	1, 5, 7 via GUM
C0192/5071	10:25pm	7:50am+1	2, 5 via GUM-Palau
C0184/5071	11:10pm	7:50am+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
C0184/5071	11:59pm	7:50am+1	2, 5 via GUM
HONG KONG (HKG)-SAIPAN			
OZ724/603	12:30am	2:20pm	Daily via ICN
OZ750/603	1:10am	2:20pm	1, 2, 4, 6 via ICN
OZ722/605	1:15pm	1:00am+1	7 via ICN
OZ722/605	1:15pm	1:30am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 via ICN
C0180/5071	11:15pm	7:50am+1	1, 5 via GUM

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); 5K: FlyGuam; 3U: Sichuan Airlines; CZ: China Southern; CO: Continental; DL: Delta Airlines; OZ: Asiana

ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. The *Saipan Tribune* is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

FREEDOM AIR FLIGHT SCHEDULE

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
Guam–Rota			
FRE 100	7:30	8:00	Daily
Rota–Saipan			
FRE 100	8:20	8:50	Daily
Guam–Rota			
FRE 300	17:00	17:30	Daily
Rota–Saipan	17:50	18:20	Daily
Saipan–Rota			
FRE 200	9:30	10:00	Daily
Rota–Guam	10:20	10:45	Daily
Saipan–Rota			
FRE 400	18:55	19:25	Daily
Rota–Guam			
FRE 400	19:40	20:10	Daily
Saipan–Tinian			
FRE 101	6:45	6:55	Daily
FRE 103	7:30	7:40	Daily
FRE 105	8:00	8:10	Daily
FRE 107	8:40	8:50	Daily
FRE 109	9:10	9:20	Daily
FRE 111	10:45	10:55	Daily

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
FRE 115	13:00	13:10	Daily
FRE 117	14:30	14:40	Daily
FRE 119	16:00	16:10	Daily
FRE 121	16:40	16:50	Daily
FRE 123	17:40	17:50	Daily
FRE 125	18:30	18:40	Daily
Tinian–Saipan			
FRE 102	7:05	7:15	Daily
FRE 104	7:50	8:00	Daily
FRE 106	8:20	8:30	Daily
FRE 108	9:00	9:10	Daily
FRE 110	10:00	10:10	Daily
FRE 112	11:05	11:15	Daily
FRE 114	12:00	12:10	Daily
FRE 116	13:30	13:40	Daily
FRE 118	14:50	15:00	Daily
FRE 120	16:20	16:30	Daily
FRE 122	17:00	17:10	Daily
FRE 124	18:05	18:15	Daily
FRE 126	18:50	19:00	Daily

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The *Saipan Tribune* accepts for FREE publication the following:

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- ISLAND SNAPSHOTS
  Birthdays, baptisms, christenings, family gatherings, reunions, club activities, and other community-related events.
- BIRTHDAY GREETINGS
  A way for families and friends to greet their loved ones, accompanied by a picture of the person celebrating his/her birthday.
- BUSINESS
  Corporate donations, volunteer work, promotions, granting of awards, team-building exercises, meetings and other activities by members of the business community.
- SAMU'T SARI
  Pictures from the islands' Filipino community, primarily focusing on Filipino activities, gatherings, get-togethers, volunteer work, etc.
- TRAVELOGUE
  Pictures of off-island travels. Contributors may submit up to 10 pictures for consideration.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- COMMUNITY BRIEFS
  Announcements of upcoming activities of organizations, community clubs, government agencies, and private companies.
- CAMPUS BULLETIN
  Announcements of upcoming activities in public and private schools, as well as calendar of activities. May include PTSA meetings, enrollment procedures.

REQUIREMENTS

For pictures:

- Photos should be original and not copyrighted. Contributors must have the right to allow the *Saipan Tribune* to publish the pictures.
- Digital pictures should be high-resolution (minimum of 800kb).
- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and phone number.
- Photos must have been taken in the last two months.
- For birthday greetings, must be submitted no later than 12 noon of the previous day to make it to next day's edition.

For announcements:

- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and a phone number.
- Must be submitted no later than 12 noon to make it to next day's edition.

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- Drop off: 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan
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- *11 on any PTI cellular phone
- Log on to the internet at www.nmicrimestoppers.com

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Business

In a first, gas and other fuels are top US export

NEW YORK (AP)—For the first time, the top export of the United States, the world's biggest gas guzzler, is—wait for it—fuel.

Measured in dollars, the nation is on pace this year to ship more gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel than any other single export, according to U.S. Census data going back to 1990. It will also be the first year in more than 60 that America has been a net exporter of these fuels.

Just how big of a shift is this? A decade ago, fuel wasn't even among the top 25 exports. And for the last five years, America's top export was aircraft

The trend is significant because for decades the U.S. has relied on huge imports of fuel from Europe in order to meet demand. It only reinforced the image of America as an energy hog. And up until a few years ago, whenever gasoline prices climbed, there were complaints in Congress that U.S. refiners were not growing quickly enough to satisfy domestic demand; that controversy would appear to be over. Still, the U.S. is nowhere close to energy independence. America is still the world's largest importer of crude oil. From January to October, the country imported 2.7 billion barrels of oil worth roughly $280 billion.

Fuel exports, worth an estimated $88 billion in 2011, have surged for two reasons:—Crude oil, the raw material from which gasoline and other refined products are made, is a lot more expensive. Oil prices averaged $95 a barrel in 2011, while gasoline averaged $3.52 a gallon—a record. A decade ago oil averaged $26 a barrel, while gasoline averaged $1.44 a gallon.

- The volume of fuel exports is rising. The U.S. is using less fuel because of a weak economy and more efficient cars and trucks. That allows refiners to sell more fuel to rapidly growing economies in Latin America, for example. In 2011, U.S. refiners exported 117 million gallons per day of gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and other petroleum products, up from 40 million gallons per day a decade earlier.

There's at least one domestic downside to America's growing role as a fuel exporter. Experts say the trend helps explain why U.S. motorists are paying more for gasoline. The more fuel that's sent overseas, the less of a supply cushion there is at home.

Gasoline supplies are being exported to the highest bidder, says Tom Kloza, chief oil analyst at Oil Price Information Service. "It's a world market," he says.

Refining companies won't say how much they make by selling fuel overseas. But analysts say those sales are likely generating higher profits per gallon than they would have generated in the U.S. Otherwise, they wouldn't occur.

The value of U.S. fuel exports has grown steadily over the past decade, coinciding with rising oil prices and increased demand around the globe.

Developing countries in Latin America and Asia have been burning more gasoline and diesel as their people buy more cars and build more roads and factories. Europe also has been buying more U.S. fuel to make up for its lack of refineries.

And there's a simple reason why America's refiners have been eager to export to these markets: gasoline demand in the U.S. has been falling every year since 2007. It dropped by another 2.5 percent in 2011. With the economy struggling, motorists cut back. Also, cars and trucks have become more fuel-efficient and the government mandates the use of more corn-based ethanol fuel.

AP

In this Nov. 10, 2010 file photo, oil refineries are shown in this aerial view, in Deer Park, Texas. For the first time, the top export of the United States, the world's biggest gas guzzler, is—wait for it—fuel.

Exxon Mobil: $908M awarded in Venezuela dispute

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)—An international arbitration body has awarded Exxon Mobil Corp. nearly $908 million in a dispute with Venezuela over compensation for the nationalization of its assets, the company said Sunday.

Exxon Mobil sought arbitration after President Hugo Chavez's government nationalized an oil project in the country in 2007.

The decision by the International Chamber of Commerce confirmed that state oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA "does have a contractual liability to Exxon Mobil," company spokesman Patrick McGinn said in an email. He said the award is for $907,588,000.

Venezuelan government officials did not respond to messages on Sunday seeking comment.

"The dispute is not over Venezuela's power to expropriate assets, but rather the failure of PDVSA to comply with contractual provisions to compensate Exxon Mobil," McGinn said.

The Irving, Texas-based oil company has not publicly released figures on how much it was seeking in compensation. McGinn said the company received the decision on Friday and was still reviewing its more than 400 pages.

According to the ICC's arbitration rules, decisions are binding.

Exxon Mobil still has another arbitration case pending against Venezuela before the World Bank-affiliated International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, or ICSID. More than a dozen other arbitration cases involving Venezuela are also pending as companies have sought billions of dollars in compensation in response to nationalizations by Chavez's leftist government.

The Caracas-based consulting firm Ecoanalitica estimated recently, before the latest Exxon Mobil decision, that the bulk of the government's nationalizations involved more than $33.7 billion in assets, including about $23 billion in outstanding obligations.

Venezuela has reached negotiated settlements on payments to some other companies.

Last month, Mexican cement company Cemex SAB said Venezuela agreed to pay $600 million for the 2008 takeover of the company's operations in the country.

2012 Medicare debate is all about the baby boomers

WASHINGTON (AP)—Baby boomers take note: Medicare as your parents have known it is headed for big changes no matter who wins the White House in 2012. You may not like it, but you might have to accept it.

Dial down the partisan rhetoric and surprising similarities emerge from competing policy prescriptions by President Barack Obama and leading Republicans such as Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan.

Limit the overall growth of Medicare spending? It's in both approaches.

Squeeze more money from upper-income retirees and some in the middle-class? Ditto.

Raise the eligibility age? That too, if the deal is right.

With more than 1.5 million baby boomers a year signing up for Medicare, the program's future is one of the most important economic issues for anyone now 50 or older. Health care costs are the most unpredictable part of retirement, and Medicare remains an exceptional deal for retirees, who can reap benefits worth far more than the payroll taxes they paid in during their careers.

"People would like to have what they used to have. What they don't seem to understand is that it's already changed," said Gail Wilensky, a former Medicare administrator and adviser to Republicans. "Medicare as we have known it is not part of our future."

Two sets of numbers underscore that point.

First, Medicare's giant trust fund for inpatient care is projected to run out of money in 2024. At that point, the program will collect only enough payroll taxes to pay 90 percent of benefits.

Second, researchers estimate that 20 to 30 percent of the more than $500 billion that Medicare now spends annually is wasted on treatments and procedures of little or no benefit to patients.

Taken together, that means policymakers can't let Medicare keep running on autopilot and they'll look for cuts before any payroll tax increases.

Privatization is the biggest divide between Democrats and Republicans.

Currently about 75 percent of Medicare recipients are in the traditional government-run, fee-for-service program and 25 percent are in private insurance plans known as Medicare Advantage.

Ryan's original approach, part of a budget plan the House passed in the spring, would have put 100 percent of future retirees into private insurance. His latest plan, developed with Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., would keep traditional Medicare as an option, competing with private plans.

Older people would get a fixed payment they could use for private health insurance or traditional Medicare. Proponents call it "premium support." To foes, it's a voucher.

Under both of Ryan's versions, people now 55 or older would not have to make any changes. GOP presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich praise his latest plan.

How would it work? Would it save taxpayers money? Would it shift costs to retirees as Ryan's earlier plan did? Would Congress later phase out traditional Medicare? Those and other questions must still be answered.

"I'm not sure anybody has come up with a formula on this that makes people comfortable," said health economist Marilyn Moon, who formerly served as a trustee helping to oversee Medicare finances.

White House spokesman Jay Carney says the Wyden-Ryan plan "would end Medicare as we know it for millions of seniors," causing the traditional program to "wither on the vine."

But what administration officials don't say is that Obama's health care law already puts in place one of Ryan's main goals by limiting future increases in Medicare spending.

Ryan would do it with a fixed payment for health insurance, adjusted to allow some growth. In theory that compels consumers and medical providers to be more cost-conscious. Obama does it with a powerful board that can force Medicare cuts to service providers if costs rise beyond certain levels and Congress fails to act.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

It's never been safer to fly; deaths at record low

NEW YORK (AP)—Boarding an airplane has never been safer. The past 10 years have been the best in the country's aviation history with 153 fatalities. That's two deaths for every 100 million passengers on commercial flights, according to an Associated Press analysis of government accident data. The improvement is remarkable. Just a decade earlier, at the time the safest, passengers were 10 times as likely to die when flying on an American plane. The risk of death was even greater during the start of the jet age, with 1,696 people dying—133 out of every 100 million passengers—from 1962 to 1971. The figures exclude acts of terrorism. Sitting in a pressurized, aluminum tube seven miles above the ground may never seem like the most-natural thing. But consider this: You are more likely to die driving to the airport than flying across the country. There are more than 30,000 motor-vehicle deaths each year, a mortality rate eight times greater than that in planes.

LG to sell 55-inch TV using new ultra-thin tech

NEW YORK (AP)—For flat-panel TVs, the choice for years has been between plasma and LCD. In the coming year, there'll be another choice, at least for those prepared to spend big. LG Electronics Inc. says it's planning to sell a 55-inch set based on organic light-emitting diodes, or OLEDs. The Korean company is set to show it off at the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, which starts Jan. 10. Samsung Electronics Co., LG's Korean rival, will also reveal a nearly market-ready OLED TV at the show, according to three people with knowledge of the matter. They spoke on condition of anonymity because Samsung has yet to make an announcement. Its website says CES announcements will come Jan. 9.

Gas prices rise 30 percent in Myanmar for new year

YANGON, Myanmar (AP)—Gas prices unexpectedly rose more than 30 percent for the new year in Myanmar and sparked fears of other goods costing more as well. Motorists learned of the increase at the pump Sunday when prices increased from 2,500 kyat (3.15 dollars) to 3,350 kyat (4.2 dollars) per Imperial gallon (4.5 liters). The government made no announcement. But with the fuel price hike, and a new 40 percent electricity cost increase announced late last year, people are concerned about inflation of consumer goods, too.

Nation

ACROSS THE NATION

New Year's shooting at Calif. condo leaves 4 dead

CORONADO, Calif. (AP)—An early morning New Year's shooting left four people dead at a condominium near San Diego, authorities said Sunday. Police responded to a 911 cellphone call of shots fired in Coronado, a wealthy seaside suburb of about 24,000 people on San Diego Bay. Officers found a man in the doorway of the condo. The bodies of two men and a woman were discovered inside the condo. San Diego County sheriff's Lt. Larry Nesbit said homicide investigators have not determined how any of the four died, though Coronado police officers who were first to arrive believe the man found in the doorway was shot.

Ranger shot and killed at Mount Rainier park

MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK, Wash. (AP)—A Mount Rainier National Park ranger was fatally shot following a New Year's Day traffic stop, and the 368-square-mile park in Washington state was closed as dozens of officers searched for the armed gunman over snowy and rugged terrain. Pierce County Sheriff's spokesman Ed Troyer said late Sunday afternoon Benjamin Colton Barnes, a 24-year-old believed to have survivalist skills, was a "strong person of interest" in the slaying of Margaret Anderson. A parks spokesman said Barnes was an Iraq war veteran. Authorities recovered his vehicle, which had weapons and body armor inside, Troyer said. Barnes was also a suspect in the early Sunday morning shooting of four people at a house party south of Seattle, police said.

Passers-by rescue children after icy river crash

SALT LAKE CITY (AP)—As many as 10 people jumped into an icy Utah river to help save three trapped children after a car plunged down a 10-foot embankment and flipped over, the state's Highway Patrol said Sunday. The rescuers helped turn the Honda Accord upright in the Logan River, and one man shot out the car's window with a handgun and cut a seat belt to help free the children after the Saturday afternoon accident, patrol Lt. Steve Winward said. The driver, Roger Andersen, 46, of Logan, lost control as he tried to brake while heading northbound on U.S. 89 during slick conditions. His 9-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son were trapped along with a second 9-year-old girl.

Bright spots, dark clouds: Obama seeks right tone

WASHINGTON (AP)—Bullish yet wary, President Barack Obama is highlighting recent economic bright spots while taking care not to overstate a recovery that still has not put millions back to work.

His Republican rivals, in the face of late-arriving economic good news, are making slight adjustments themselves, arguing that Obama's policies have been a drag on a recovery that could have taken hold sooner.

The competing rhetoric reflects the positive indicators in areas ranging from retail sales and housing to unemployment and falling gas prices. All this has pushed up consumer confidence, a potential barometer of political attitudes. Even Congress and Obama managed to agree on a two-month payroll tax cut extension before leaving Washington for the holidays.

But the economic signs could prove fleeting, as they were in the early spring when economist also detected upticks in activity only to watch them tumble. These new indicators may hold more promise. But a looming European debt crisis is casting a pall.

No one is more aware of that risk than Obama.

"We've got an economy that is showing some positive signs; we've seen many consecutive months of private sector job growth," Obama said last week before departing for Christmas in Hawaii. "But it's not happening as fast as it needs to."

For Obama, the danger is in promoting an economy that while, slowly recovering, has yet to reflect reality for millions of Americans, or in highlighting positive signs only to see them falter in 2012.

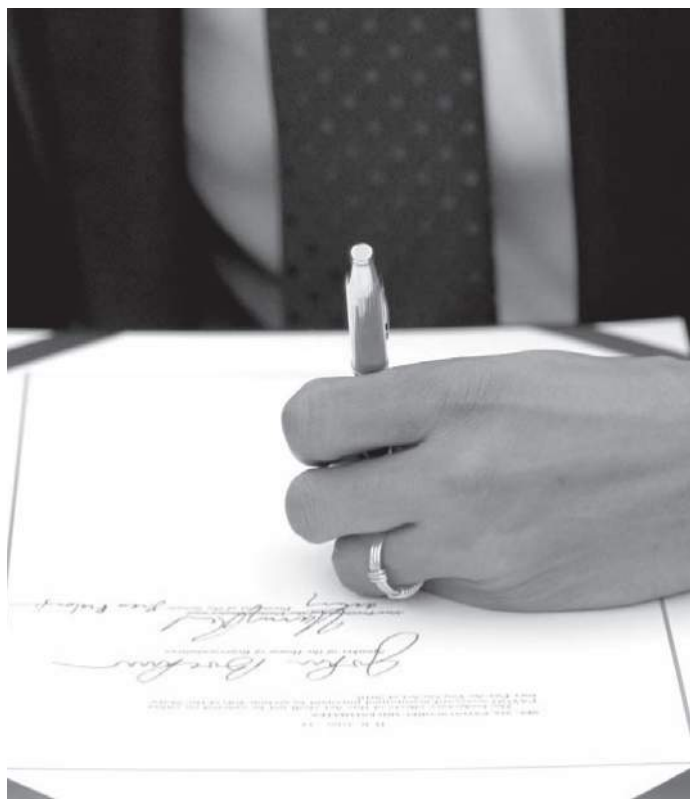
For David Axelrod, the Obama campaign's top political adviser, visions of a European financial meltdown are what keep him awake at night.

"I think the American economy is gaining strength, I don't think many would argue that point," he said. "The imponderable is not about that, it's really about these externalities and particularly Europe. Especially now that we've passed this threshold on the payroll tax cut and assuming that the Republicans in Congress don't want to rerun that battle, the one big thing on the horizon is Europe."

Indeed, as the year ends on an up note, leading economists surveyed by The Associated Press expect the economy will grow slightly faster in 2012—about 2.4 percent compared with the less than 2 percent annual growth that the economy is expected to register by the end of this year.

But underscoring the political challenges facing Obama, these same economists don't expect unemployment to drop much in a year from November's 8.6 percent rate.

The public's economic outlook is improving. An Associated Press-GfK poll in December found that 37 percent of those questioned expect improvement in the economy in the coming year. It was the first time since May that the sentiment significantly outweighed the share saying the economy would get worse in the next year.



AP

In this Dec. 23, 2011 file photo, President Barack Obama signs the payroll tax cut extension, in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington.

This modestly rosy scenario is contingent on keeping any financial disruptions in Europe contained to the other side of the Atlantic. Obama has pressing European leaders, particularly German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, to act swiftly to avoid a wholesale debt crisis from taking hold. But Obama has few tools other than persuasion with which to influence an outcome.

In a trend the Obama camp is sure to watch, the public is holding Obama more accountable for the economy. The AP-GfK poll found that the percentage who says Obama deserves little or no blame for the economy's sluggishness has declined from 43 percent in October to 36 percent now.

Republicans are watching, too.

After months of asserting that conditions under Obama have worsened, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney this past acknowledged signs of improvement, but gave Obama no credit.

"I think the economy's getting better. I sure hope so," Romney told CNN on Wednesday. "There's never been a time when our economy has not recovered from recession. We will recover, but it will not be thanks to the president's policies. It will be in spite of the president's policies."

Republican pollster Wes Anderson, a veteran of congressional and presidential contests, says the first quarter of 2012 could lay down crucial markers that could affect the election results.

"If the uptick in economic indicators that we've seen here this month continues into the next month at the same general pace, it will be an interesting race and it will be very close, and there will be an opportunity for Obama to win," he said. "If economic conditions deteriorate at all, I think he's done.

NASA marks 2012 with twin probes in moon orbit

LOS ANGELES (AP)—NASA kicked off the new year with a pair of probes circling the moon in the latest mission to understand how Earth's closest neighbor formed.

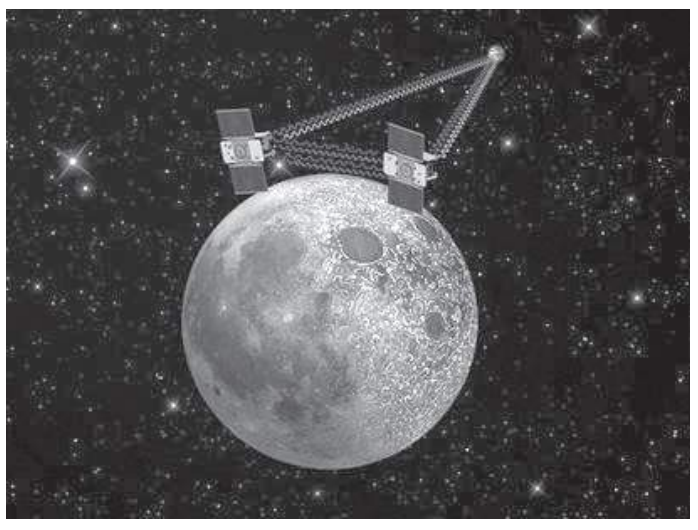
There was no champagne popping in the mission control room at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory when the Grail spacecraft arrived back-to-back over the New Year's weekend, but several scientists and engineers celebrated by blowing noisemakers.

"It's a really good feeling to have not one but two of our twins in orbit," project manager David Lehman said Sunday after the mission was deemed successful.

The action began on New Year's Eve when Grail-A swung over the south pole, fired its engine and braked into orbit around the moon. Not to be outdone, its twin Grail-B executed the same maneuvers on New Year's Day.

The arrivals capped a roundabout journey spanning 3 1/2 months and covering 2 1/2 million miles.

The moon has long been an object of fascination. Galileo spotted mountains and craters when he peered at it through a telescope. Poets and songwriters looked to the moon as a muse.



AP

This undated artist rendering provided by NASA on Dec. 21,2011 shows the twin Grail spacecraft mapping the lunar gravity field.

Even governments wanted a piece of the moon. Since the dawn of the Space Age, more than 100 missions launched by the United States, Soviet Union, Japan, China and India have targeted Earth's companion. NASA flew six Apollo missions that landed twelve men on the lunar surface and brought back more than 800 pounds of rock and soil samples.

Despite all the attention, the moon remains mysterious. Mission chief scientist Maria Zuber of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said researchers know more about Mars, which is farther away from the Earth, than the moon.

One of the enduring puzzles is its lopsided shape with the far side more hilly than the side that Earth sees. Research published earlier this year suggested that our planet once had two moons that crashed early in the solar system's history and created the moon that graces the sky today.

Scientists expect to learn more about how the celestial body formed using Grail's gravity measurements that will indicate what's below the surface.

Romney's chief Iowa rivals press electability

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP)—With time running short, Ron Paul, Rick Santorum and other Republican presidential contenders insisted they could beat President Barack Obama as they worked to persuade undecided Iowa Republicans aching to win the White House to choose them over chief rival Mitt Romney.

Romney

"I'm the candidate that actually was able to win in states, as a conservative, in getting Democrats and independents to vote for us," Santorum, the former Pennsylvania senator who is surging in the race and is a favorite among cultural conservatives, said in an interview on CNN. "Mitt Romney has no track history of doing that."

Paul, a libertarian-leaning Texas congressman who Romney has said is outside the GOP mainstream, countered the suggestion that he's a fringe candidate. In an interview with ABC from his home state, where he was spending the weekend, Paul insisted: "I'm electable. I've been elected 12 times in Texas, when people get to know me."

With Romney in a position of strength in Iowa, both Santorum and Paul went directly at the former Massachusetts governor's chief argument—that he is the most electable Republican in a head-to-head matchup against Obama next fall. They hope they can sway the roughly half of likely caucus-goers who say they are undecided or willing to change their minds two days before the leadoff presidential caucuses.

A Des Moines Register poll released Saturday showed Romney and Paul locked in a close race, with Santorum rising swiftly to challenge them. Nearly half of likely Iowa caucus-goers view Romney as the Republican most likely to win the general election. He was far ahead of Santorum and Paul, who was viewed as the least likely to win.

Those two are fighting against the notion in GOP circles that their bases of support are narrow and neither would be able to cobble together the diverse voting coalition necessary to beat Obama in November.

Asia

NKorea vows to defend Kim Jong Un 'unto death'

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP)—North Korea vowed Sunday to make an all-out drive for prosperity as it unites behind new leader Kim Jong Un, ushering in 2012 with promises to resolve food shortages, bolster its military and defend Kim Jong Il's young son "unto death."

The pledge in North Korea's annual New Year's message comes as the country enters a new era, with Kim Jong Un installed as supreme commander of the 1.2 million-strong military and as ruling party leader following his father's Dec. 17 death.

On the streets of Pyongyang, the mood was more somber than in past New Year's celebrations, as people gathered in large crowds to pay tribute to Kim Jong Il, who ruled the country for 17 years.

This New Year's message didn't include the North's routine harsh criticism of the United States and avoided the country's nuclear ambitions, a suggestion that Pyongyang may be willing to continue talks with Washington to win food aid.

This year is a crucial one for North Korea as it tries to build a "great, prosperous and powerful nation" befitting the April 2012 centenary of the birth of national founder Kim Il Sung, the new leader's grandfather.

"Glorify this year 2012 as a year of proud victory, a year when an era of prosperity is unfolding," said the New Year's message, carried by the official Korean Central News Agency. "The whole party, the entire army and all the people should possess a firm conviction that they will become human bulwarks and human shields in defending Kim Jong Un unto death."

In Pyongyang, the day was cold, snowy and gray, with splashes of bright color provided by flags, lanterns and banners reading "Happy New Year" that decorated the streets. The celebration, however, coming just days after the official mourning period for Kim Jong Il ended, was muted, unlike past years when cheerful people in their best holiday clothes thronged the streets.

From early morning, streams of people, their expressions solemn, bowed and laid bouquets and wreaths at monuments to Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung. Families trudged through the snow, carrying potted flowers and plants, to put their offerings beneath large portraits of a broadly smiling Kim Jong Il.

Workers at covered flower stands handed out yellow and red flowers to large crowds. Some slogans around the city repeated the official New Year's message, calling on citizens to glorify the coming year. Newly released posters urged people to "turn sorrow into strength and courage," a sentiment often heard from North Koreans since Kim's death.

"We lost the great Kim Jong Il because we did not do our work well. How can we have a rest?" Vice Minister of Mining Industry Pak Thae Gu told The Associated Press.

Kim Jong Un spent part of the day visiting a tank division, state media said, in what was apparently his first reported military field inspection since his father's death. Kim Jong Il regularly visited military units, factories and farms across the country, and his son's trip provides further evidence of the North's intention to link him closely with the military.

Kim Jong Un praised soldiers for closely watching enemy troops, KCNA reported. He was accompanied by his uncle and key patron Jang Song Thaek and Ri Yong Ho, chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army.

AP

In this Jan. 1, 2012 image released by the Korean Central News Agency and distributed Monday, Jan. 2, 2012 in Tokyo by the Korea News Service, North Korea's new leader Kim Jong Un, left, applauds with military personnel as he inspects Seoul Ryu Kyong Su 105 Guards Tank Division of the Korean People's Army in North Korea to congratulate servicepersons on New Year's day.

French defense minister backs Taliban talks

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—France's defense minister on Sunday backed U.S. efforts to open peace talks with the Taliban, saying a proposed Taliban liaison office outside Afghanistan would provide a venue for those within the radical Islamic movement who are willing to explain their positions.

The idea of opening a Taliban political office in Doha, the capital of the Gulf nation of Qatar, has become the central element of efforts to draw the insurgent movement into peace talks and end more than a decade of war.

Speaking at the end of a brief visit to French troops, Gerard Longuet said he had asked Afghan President Hamid Karzai about the idea.

Karzai "explained the reasons ... for Doha as a venue for meetings where the Taliban who wish to do so can express themselves and meet with Afghans or members of the coalition who wish to talk to them," Longuet said.

"It seems that there is a part among the forces fighting against the (government), there is a will to explain themselves, to be understood. We should never close that door."

Earlier this week, a senior U.S. official told The Associated Press that Washington plans to continue a series of secret meetings with Taliban representatives in Europe and the Persian Gulf region next year.

The U.S. outreach this year had progressed to the point that there was active discussion of two steps the Taliban seeks as precursors to negotiations, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue.

Trust-building measures under discussion involve setting up a Taliban headquarters office and the release from the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, of about five Afghan prisoners believed to be affiliated with the Taliban.

Longuet said he was satisfied with the improving performance of the Afghan security forces and the pace of the transfer of responsibility for security to them. NATO and the Afghan government expect the transition to be complete by 2014, when coalition troops are due to end their combat role.

Currently, about 3,600 French soldiers are serving in the NATO force, mostly in northeastern Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the death on Saturday of a NATO service member in a noncombat incident brought to 544 the number of NATO troops who died in Afghanistan in 2011. A NATO statement provided no further details.

The yearly total for 2011 is considerably lower than for 2010, when more than 700 troops died. But the numbers of wounded have remained consistently high, dipping only slightly from last year's total of more than 5,000 service members. And despite the drop in the numbers of deaths, 2011 has been the second-deadliest for NATO troops in the 10-year war.

About 840 Afghan soldiers and policemen have died in 2011, according to a count by The Associated Press.

The U.S.-led coalition has repeatedly touted its success against the guerrillas in 2011, which marked the high point of the international military presence in Afghanistan with more than 130,000 troops on the ground. NATO says it has taken hundreds of Taliban commanders off the battlefields and seized control areas which once represented the insurgency's heartland in the south and east of the country.

ASIAN BRIEFS

Report: Toxic homebrew kills 16 in India

NEW DELHI (AP)—An official says at least 16 people have died after drinking a toxic homebrewed liquor over the weekend in southern India. Gaurav Uppal, a top district administrator, says another 24 poor villagers are being treated in hospitals in the Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh state. Seven people died soon after drinking the illegally brewed alcohol on Saturday and another nine lost their lives on Sunday, the Press Trust of India news agency quoted Uppal as saying. Uppal could not be reached immediately for comment. The region is nearly 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) south of New Delhi.

1 dead, 739 injured in Philippine New Year revelry

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Philippine health officials say a boy has died from massive injuries from a firecracker explosion in the first known death from violent New Year's revelries that also injured 739 others. The Department of Health reported Monday that the 10-year-old boy packed a small can with explosive powder, which exploded and injured him seriously when he threw it into flames. He died en route to a hospital in northern Cabanatuan city on New Year's eve. Officials say 712 others were wounded by firecrackers and 22 by celebratory gunfire. Five kids accidentally swallowed tiny firecrackers.

Philippine police: Ransom demanded for Australian

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Suspected Muslim militants have demanded ransom for the freedom of a kidnapped Australian and have sent proof that he is alive, Philippine police said Sunday. The kidnappers mailed four pictures of 53-year-old Warren Richard Rodwell before Christmas to his Filipino wife then called her to demand an initial ransom of $23,000 (1 million pesos). Rodwell appeared to have been wounded in the hand by gunfire in one picture but looked well, police Senior Superintendent Ruben Cariaga said. Rodwell, a former university teacher in Shanghai, was taken at gunpoint by about six men on Dec. 5 in southern Ipil town in Zamboanga Sibugay province. It was the latest abduction of a foreigner in the country's volatile south where several kidnappings for ransom have been blamed on the al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf group.

SKorea president warns NKorea against provocations

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—South Korea's president opened the door Monday to possible nuclear talks with North Korea and warned the neighboring country to avoid any provocations, saying the Korean peninsula is at a crucial turning point.

Lee Myung-bak's comments in a nationally televised speech come as the young son of the late Kim Jong Il takes power in North Korea as Supreme Commander of the military and ruling party leader after Kim's death last month. The North vowed Sunday in a New Year's message that it would bolster its military and defend the son, Kim Jong Un, "unto death."

Lee

"The situation on the Korean peninsula is now entering a new turning point," Lee said. "But there should be a new opportunity amid changes and uncertainty."

Lee warned that South Korea would sternly respond to any North Korean provocation. In 2010, 50 South Koreans died in attacks blamed on the North, though the Koreas have met in recent months for preliminary nuclear discussions.

North Korea, which has tested two atomic devices since 2006, has said it wants to return to long-stalled six-nation talks on halting its nuclear weapons program in return for aid. Washington and Seoul, however, have insisted that the North first show progress on past disarmament commitments. If North Korea halts its continuing nuclear activities, Lee said in his speech, negotiations could resume.

"We are ready to resolve security concerns on the Korean peninsula and provide assistance to revive North Korea's economy through agreements in the six-nation talks," Lee said.

North Korea, however, has so far taken a hard line toward the South. It warned last week that there would be no softening of its position toward South Korea's government after Kim Jong Il's death. North Korea's powerful National Defense Commission said the country would never deal with Lee.

On Monday, Pyongyang accused Lee of plotting to shake up the North by temporarily placing his troops on high alert after Kim Jong Il's death. The North's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper said in a commentary carried by the official Korean Central News Agency that Lee must "kneel down and apologize" for his acts.

North Korea has regularly criticized Lee since he took office in 2008 and ended a no-strings-attached aid policy toward the North. Lee sought to link aid to progress in North Korea's nuclear disarmament.

The six-nation nuclear talks involve the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

The Korean peninsula remains technically in a state of conflict because the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce, not a peace treaty.

World

World rings in 2012, bids adieu to a tough 2011

NEW YORK (AP)—From New Zealand to New York, the world eagerly welcomed a new year Sunday with confetti-filled celebrations, glittering fireworks displays and star-studded festivities.

For one night, at least, revelers gathered and hoped for a better future, saying goodbye to a year of hurricanes, tsunamis and economic turmoil that many would rather forget.

In New York, hundreds of thousands gathered at the crossroads of the world to witness a crystal ball with more than 30,000 lights that descended at midnight. Lady Gaga and Mayor Michael Bloomberg led the crowd in the final-minute countdown of the famed crystal-paneled ball drop.

Matheus Campos, a law student from Brazil, threw both arms in the air as the new year began in Times Square.

"It's awesome," he said.

Revelers in Australia, Asia, Europe and the South Pacific island nation of Samoa, which jumped across the international dateline to be first to celebrate, welcomed 2012 with booming pyrotechnic displays. Fireworks soared over Moscow's Red Square, crowds on Paris' Champs-Elysees boulevard popped Champagne corks at midnight.

But many approached the new year with more relief than joy, as people battered by weather disasters, joblessness and economic uncertainty hoped the stroke of midnight would change their fortunes.

"It was a pretty tough year, but God was looking after us and I know 2012 has got to be better," said Kyralee Scott, 16, of Jackson, N.J., whose father spent most of the year out of work.

Some New York revelers, wearing party hats and "2012" glasses, began camping out Saturday morning, even as workers readied bags stuffed with hundreds of balloons and technicians put colored filters on klieg lights. The crowds cheered as workers lit the crystal-paneled ball that would drop at midnight Saturday and put it through a test run, 400 feet above the street. The sphere, decorated with 3,000 Waterford crystal triangles, has been dropping to mark the new year since 1907, long before television made it a U.S. tradition.

In Times Square, hundreds of thousands people crammed into spectator pens ringed by barricades, enjoying surprisingly warm weather for the Northeast. The National Weather Service said it was about 49 degrees in nearby Central Park—about 10 degrees warmer than the normal high temperature.

As the country prepared for the celebration, glum wasn't on the agenda for many, even those who had a sour year.

AP

Russians celebrate the New Year on Red Square in Moscow, with the Kremlin Spassky tower and the Mausoleum of Lenin in the background, Russia, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2012.

"We're hoping the next year will be better," said Becky Martin, a former elementary school teacher who drove from Rockford, Ill., to Times Square after spending a fruitless year trying to find a job. "We're starting off optimistic and hoping it lasts."

Many expressed cautious hope that better times were ahead after a year in which Japan was ravaged by an earthquake and tsunami, hurricanes wreaked havoc across the country and a debt crisis devastated Europe's economy.

"Everybody's suffering. That's why it's so beautiful to be here celebrating something with everybody," said Lisa Nicol, 47, of Melbourne, Australia.

For all of the holiday's bittersweet potential, New York City always treats it like a big party—albeit one that now takes place under the watchful eye of a massive security force, including more than 1,500 police officers.

Dick Clark, who suffered a stroke in 2004, put in a few brief appearances mentioning that he has hosted his namesake New Year's Eve celebration for years, but said "tonight, it's better than ever." Clark, looking cheerful but struggling with his speech, introduced a performance by Lady Gaga and also assisted in the countdown. The show, hosted by Ryan Seacrest also featured a performance by Justin Bieber. Natalie Tolli, a 13-year-old from Yonkers, said "it was the best time I ever had, especially seeing Justin Bieber in his red hat."

Her father, George Tolli, said he and his wife and three daughters and son waited since 2 p.m. to get their place.

"It was a pleasant surprise, very controlled," he said. "In my 51 years, I've never been here for New Year's. But I did it for the kids. And it was worth it."

In Las Vegas, fireworks were launched from eight rooftops at midnight. Police earlier shut down a four-mile section of the Strip to vehicle traffic, letting revelers party in the street. Casino nightclubs touted pricey, exclusive bashes hosted by celebrities including Kim Kardashian, Bruno Mars and Fergie.

Authorities reported only minor hiccups, including an ash tray canister fire on the 15th floor of the Paris Las Vegas hotel casino and an intermittent power outage at Bellagio that led to casino officials closing its buffet.

The Bellagio outage also affected a bank of slot machines and some guest rooms, but the problem was fixed before 8 p.m., allowing all gambling, nightclub parties and shows to go forward.

Thousands of New Year's celebrants turned out in Salt Lake City for a variety of events organized by the Downtown Alliance, while in Seattle crowds were treated to a fireworks display that included barrages from the top of the city's iconic Space Needle.

Yemenis rally, demand that president face trial

SANAA, Yemen (AP)—Yemen's opposition on Sunday accused outgoing President Ali Abdullah Saleh of trying to torpedo a power transfer deal by sparking a new crisis, as troops loyal to him clashed with opposition forces, killing three.

The violence was evidence that the president's signature on a power transfer deal has not ended months of turmoil that have benefited al-Qaida-linked militants.

Sunday's clashes followed Saleh's decision not to leave the country, a move likely to embolden his relatives, who control key security posts.

His opponents demand the removal of all of Saleh's relatives from top security positions. Huge crowds of protesters have called for Saleh himself to be put on trial for the killing of hundreds of protesters, though the power transfer deal gives him immunity from prosecution.

Vice President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi told his new national unity government on Sunday, in their first official session, that the power transfer agreement, engineered by Yemen's powerful Gulf Arab neighbors, must be implemented soon.

"We need to move vigorously and effectively to implement the Gulf initiative and its mechanisms," he said.

The new government's first task is to push through the law shielding Saleh from prosecution for alleged corruption and for violence against protesters. Saleh made that a condition for signing the deal to relinquish power after 33 years of rule over the Arab world's poorest nation.

Yet more than a month after Saleh signed, and after the possibility of his flying to the U.S. was raised, Saleh is still in Yemen, still wielding significant power and showing few, if any, signs of giving in.

Ten months of mass protests and armed clashes between forces loyal to Saleh and his opponents, including army units that followed powerful tribal leaders siding with the opposition, have left a power vacuum. The Yemen branch of al-Qaida, considered one of the world's most dangerous, has taken advantage of that to dig in to positions in the country's south, taking over towns and villages.

Yemen's military fights frequent battles with the Islamist militants but has failed to dislodge them.

Arab body calls for pullout of monitors in Syria

CAIRO (AP)—A pan-Arab body called Sunday for the immediate withdrawal of the Arab League monitors in Syria because President Bashar Assad's regime has kept up killings of government opponents even in the presence of the observers.

The 88-member Arab Parliament said that Arabs are angered by the Syrian regime's ongoing killings while the nearly 100 monitors are in the country. The monitors are supposed to be ensuring Syria complies with terms of the League's plan to end the 9-month-old crackdown on dissent—a plan Syria agreed to on Dec. 19.

However, the Kuwaiti head of the Arab Parliament, Ali Salem al-Deqbasi, said the presence of the monitors is distracting from the "flagrant violations" committed by Assad's regime.

"The killing of children and the violation of human rights law is happening in the presence of Arab League monitors, raising the fury of Arab people," he said.

"The mission of the Arab League team has missed its aim of stopping the killing of children and ensuring the withdrawal of troops from the Syrian streets, giving the Syrian regime a cover to commit inhumane acts under the noses of the Arab League observers," al-Deqbasi said in a statement.

The Arab League created the Arab Parliament, which is made up of lawmakers and advisers from states around the Middle East. Its recommendations are nonbinding and it operates separately from the Arab League.

While the Arab Parliament has little sway on Damascus or the Arab League, al-Deqbasi's remarks about the observer mission represents growing concern about the monitors' ability to deter Assad's regime from killing protesters.

According to activists, more than 150 people have been killed across the country since the observers began their one-month mission on Tuesday.

The U.N. says more than 5,000 people have died as the government has sought to crush the revolt.

The Arab League plan demands that the government remove its security forces and heavy weapons from cities, start talks with the opposition and allow human rights workers and journalists into the country. It also calls for the release of all political prisoners.

Egypt defends storming of civil society groups

CAIRO (AP)—A top Egyptian official responsible for overseeing civil society groups on Sunday defended sweeps through the offices of 10 human rights and pro-democracy organizations, rejecting denunciations from the U.S., U.N. and Germany.

It was the first comment from the Egyptian government since the sweeps Thursday that targeted, among others, U.S.-based groups invited to observe Egypt's months-long election process.

Reports of heavily armed police and soldiers storming into offices, sealing the doors, rifling through files and confiscating computers set off a wave of international protest against Egypt's rulers.

International Cooperation Minister Faiza Aboul Naga defended the operation as a legitimate investigation into organizations suspected of operating without permits and receiving "political funding" against the law.

Aboul Naga pointed to repeated complaints from the judiciary and the ruling military about civil society groups acceptng foreign funds to promote protests and instability and "influence public opinion in non-peaceful ways." She said the order to investigate the groups came from independent judges.

The military has pointed to "foreign hands" behind clashes with protesters who are demanding that the military hand over power to civilians. More than 100 people have been killed in the clashes since the military took over in February.

Rights groups dismiss the charges as an attempt to taint the reform movement that led to the ouster of longtime President Hosni Mubarak in a popular uprising that demanded democracy and human rights.

The U.S.-based National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute and Freedom House all denounced the sweeps.

Aboul Naga, who was appointed by Mubarak and has survived numerous Cabinet reshuffles since his ouster, refused to call the coordinated security sweep a raid.

"This was not a raid or a storming or an attack. It was an investigation," she said. "There are foreign civil society groups that began operating without permission, which is totally outside the law."

Under Mubarak, the government rarely licensed pro-democracy and rights organizations, forcing them to work in a legal limbo. The situation has not changed since Mubarak's fall.

Focus

POCATELLO, Idaho (AP)—Jenni Lake gave birth to a baby boy the month before her 18th birthday, though she was not destined to become just another teenage mother.

AP
In this Dec. 6, 2011 photo, Diana Phillips, Jenni Lake's mother, cries while holding Jenni's son, Chad Michael Lake Wittman, in Pocatello, Idaho.

Idaho teen loses cancer fight after delivering son

That much, she knew.

While being admitted to the hospital, she pulled her nurse down to her at bed level and whispered into her ear. The nurse would later repeat the girl's words to comfort her family, as their worst fears were realized a day after Jenni's baby was born.

"She told the nurse, 'I'm done, I did what I was supposed to. My baby is going to get here safe,'" said Diana Phillips, Jenni's mother.

In photographs, the baby's ruddy cheeks and healthy weight offer a stark contrast to the frail girl who gave birth to him. She holds the newborn tightly, kissing the top of his head. Jenni, at 5 feet and 4 inches tall, weighed only 108 pounds at the full term of her pregnancy.

A day after the Nov. 9 birth, Phillips learned that her daughter's decision to forgo treatment for tumors on her brain and spine so she could carry the baby would have fatal repercussions. The cancer had marked too much territory. Nothing could be done, Phillips said.

It was only 12 days past the birth—half spent in the hospital and the other half at home—before Jenni was gone.

Even so, her family and friends insist her legacy is not one centered in tragedy, but rather in sacrifice.

This month, her family gathered at their ranch style home in Pocatello, where a Christmas tree in the living room was adorned with ornaments picked out just for Jenni, including one in bright lime green, her favorite color. She had passed away in a bedroom down the hall.

Recalling Jenni's infectious laugh and a rebellious streak, her mother held the baby close, nuzzling his head, and said, "I want him to know everything about her, and what she did."

The migraines started last year, when Jenni was a 16-year-old sophomore at Pocatello High School. She was taken to the family doctor, and an MRI scan found a small mass measuring about two centimeters wide on the right side of her brain.

She was sent to a hospital in Salt Lake City, some 150 miles south of Pocatello, and another scan there showed the mass was bigger than previously thought.

Jenni had a biopsy Oct. 15, 2010, and five days later was diagnosed with stage three astrocytoma, a type of brain tumor. With three tumors on her brain and three on her spine, Jenni was told her case was rare because the cancer had spread from her brain to another part of her body with no symptoms.

Her parents, who are divorced, remember they were brought into a room at the hospital and sat down at a long table as doctors discussed her chances of survival.

"Jenni just flat out asked them if she was going to die," said her father, Mike Lake, 43, a truck driver who lives in Rexburg, north of Pocatello.

The answer wasn't good. With treatment, the teen was told she had a 30 percent chance to make it two years, Lake said. While he was heartbroken, Lake marveled at how strong she seemed in that moment. "She didn't break down and cry or anything," he said.

But her mom recalled Jenni did have a weak moment that day.

"When they told her that she might not be able to have kids, she got upset," said Phillips, 39.

Jenni started aggressive chemotherapy and radiation treatments, while also posting videos on a YouTube site titled "Jenni's Journey," where she hoped to share her story with updates every other day. She managed to upload only three videos, though, as her treatments left her tired and weak.

On her second video, posted Nov. 20, 2010, Jenni appears distraught while a family friend records her having lunch with her mom.

"Last night, like, I was just lying in bed and I was thinking about everything that was going on and it just like, it just hit me, like everything, and I don't know, it made me cry," Jenni says on the video.

Her mom is shown burying her face in her hands. "Do you know how hard it is to be a mom and know that she's sick and there's nothing you can do," she says, before collapsing into tears.

Jenni persists: "It's hard. It's like, I don't know how long this is going to last and I just want it to go away ... I feel like this is holding me back from so much ..."

By March of this year, the tumors had started to shrink, the family said.

In a picture taken at her prom in early May, Jenni is wearing a dark blue strapless dress and gives the camera a small smile. There's a silver headband in her hair, which is less than an inch long. Chemotherapy took her shoulder-length blond tresses.

Her boyfriend, Nathan Wittman, wearing a black dress shirt and pants, is cradling her from behind.

Jenni started dating Nathan a couple of weeks before she received her diagnosis. Their adolescent relationship withstood the very adult test posed by cancer, the treatments that left her barely able to walk from her living room to her bedroom, and the gossip at school.

"The rumors started flying around, like Nathan was only with her because she had cancer," said Jenni's older sister, Ashlee Lake, 20, who tried to squelch the mean-spirited chatter even as the young couple ignored it.

They were hopeful, and dreamed of someday opening a restaurant or a gallery.

Jenni had been working as an apprentice in a local tattoo shop. "She was like our little sister," said the owner, Kass Chacon. But in May, Jenni's visits to the shop grew less frequent.

She had been throwing up a lot and had sharp stomach pains. She went to the emergency room early one morning with her boyfriend and when she returned home, her family members woke up to the sound of crying. "We could hear Jenni just bawling in her room," said her sister, Kaisee, 19.

She had learned that she was pregnant, and an ultrasound would show the fetus was 10 weeks old.

Jenni's journey was no longer her own.

From the start of treatment, she was told that she might never have children, her mother said, that the radiation and chemotherapy could essentially make her sterile.

"We were told that she couldn't get pregnant, so we didn't worry about it," said Nathan, 19.

Jenni, the third of her parents' eight children, had always wanted to be a mom. She had already determined to keep the baby when she went to see her oncologist, Dr. David Ririe, in Pocatello two days after she found out she was pregnant.

"He told us that if she's pregnant, she can't continue the treatments," Phillips said. "So she would either have to terminate the pregnancy and continue the treatments, or stop the treatments, knowing that it could continue to grow again."

Dr. Ririe would not discuss Jenni's care, citing privacy laws, but said, generally, in cases in which a cancer patient is pregnant, oncologists will consider both the risks and benefits of continuing with treatment, such as chemotherapy.

"There are times during pregnancy in some situations, breast cancer being the classic example, where the benefits of chemotherapy may outweigh the risk to mother and baby," Ririe said. "There are other times where the risk outweighs the benefits."

There was no discussion about which path Jenni would choose. Her parents didn't think of it as a clear life or death decision, and Jenni may not have, either. They believed that since the tumors had already started to shrink earlier, she had a strong chance of carrying the baby and then returning to treatment after he was born.

"I guess we were just hoping that after she had the baby, she could go back on the chemotherapy and get better," her mother said.

Jenni and Nathan named the baby Chad Michael, after their dads. Nathan has legal custody of the child, who is primarily cared for by Nathan's mother, Alexia Wittman, 51.

"Nathan will raise him," she said. She brings the baby to Jenni's house to visit her family whenever they ask.

Jenni didn't show regret for her decision, not in the final weeks of her pregnancy as she grew weaker, and not when she started to lose her vision as the cancer took its course, her family said.

Jenni's last words were about her son as he was placed beside her a final time, her father said. As she felt for the baby, she said: "I can kind of see him."

Overdrive

2012 Mazda5 right-sizes the minivan

By LARRY PRINTZ
THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

MCT

The Mazda5 weighs more than 1,000 pounds less than the Odyssey. Less weight means less horsepower is needed to move it around. It also means less weight while driving, making the Mazda5 one of the only minivans that's actually fun to drive.

When Chrysler created the market for minivans back in 1983, the Dodge Caravan, Plymouth Voyager and Chrysler Town and Country were 175.9 inches long and powered by either a 90-horsepower four-cylinder engine or a 136-hp V-6.

By contrast, today's minivans are corpulent. The current Honda Odyssey is more than two feet longer and has an engine with almost double the horsepower. So it's little wonder that current minivan buyers perceive the Mazda5 as a bit too mini and not enough van. But that's only due to its frame of reference: other new minivans. Compared to the original, the Mazda5 is a keeper of flame. Truly mini, efficient and utilitarian, it's close in size to the first minivans. And it has something else: style.

The Mazda5 has received a freshening for 2012 using what Mazda calls its "Nagare" design language. This seeks to incorporate the sense of wind and water to lend the Mazda5 a sense of motion. Couple that with its friendly face, which looks as if it was lifted from Japanese anime, and most casual observers thinks it's just a funky wagon or hatchback. This is a minivan that—and I apologize for this horrid cliche—thinks outside the box.

But it's the size of the vehicle that will put off most buyers, and it shouldn't. Given that most households are shrinking, one would think that this vehicle would be sufficient for towing kids and their gear. And it is. But that comes with caveats. This is, after all, a minivan not much longer than a Toyota Corolla and it has three rows of seats.

So, to accommodate people and stuff, Mazda got crafty. There are three rows of bucket seats, so the van seats a total of six. Doing that leaves just enough room for a bachelor's trip to the supermarket. Legroom is tight in the last row, unless the second row pulls their seats forward. Of course, you can fold the third row, which leaves a large, flat cargo hold.

If this sounds like a deal breaker, it isn't. The rear sliding doors provide easy access to the second row (and their windows roll down.)

Not enough for you? Take a test drive; that's where you'll be surprised.

The Mazda5 weighs more than 1,000 pounds less than the Odyssey. Less weight means less horsepower is needed to move it around. It also means less weight while driving, making the Mazda5 one of the only minivans that's actually fun to drive.

Not that you will unleash your inner Andretti while piloting one. But in the daily trip down pokey parkways, this vehicle has the same energetic feel, firm ride, nominal body lean and good brakes you'd find in a Mazda3—one of the most fun-to-drive compacts you can buy. The reason for this is simple: The Mazda5 uses the Mazda3 platform.

This year, Mazda did fit the 5 with a larger four-cylinder engine. Power is now rated at 157 ponies. Most will be fitted with five-speed automatic transmission, which can be shifted manually. But unlike every other minivan on the market, a six-speed manual transmission is available, although fuel economy is identical to the automatic.

While that's enough power with 2 or 3 folks aboard, loading up this little wonder will slow its progress.

The cabin itself was fairly quiet, and the test car came furnished with some niceties, like heated front seats, Bluetooth audio and telephone, satellite radio, automatic climate control and two front-seat powerpoints. There was no connection for an iPod. Also, two items you might want—a GPS navigation system and rear-view camera—aren't offered.

The radio display, a thin slit across the top of the dashboard, also displays information for other functions, so satellite radio information is so limited that it's useless. And the 5 dropped satellite stations way too often.

But none of this is enough to dissuade my recommendation of the Mazda5. Its nimble feel, perfect size and fuel-efficient ways make it true to the minivan ideal.

NUTS & BOLTS

2012 Mazda5:

- **Engine:** 2.5-liter DOHC four-cylinder
- **Wheelbase:** 108.3 inches
- **Length:** 180.5 inches
- **Weight:** 3,457 pounds
- **Cargo space:** 5.58-44.4 cubic feet
- **EPA rating** (city/highway): 21/28 mpg
- **Fuel consumption:** 26 mpg
- **Fuel type:** Regular
- **Base price, base model:** $19,345
- **Base price, test model:** $24,025
- **As tested:** $24,870

UNDER THE HOOD

Squealing noise a warning from brakes

By BRAD BERGHOLDT
MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

QUESTION: I've begun hearing a faint squealing noise from my car—in the front, I think. It increases as I speed up and sometimes goes away if I use the brakes. With the holidays, this isn't the best time for a car repair. Is it important that I fix this right away?—Doreen H.

ANSWER: There's a good chance the noise you've so nicely described is a brake-pad wear sensor beginning to sound off. These are little metal tabs attached to the inner brake pad that come into contact with the brake rotor when the pad's friction material wears thin. While the nail on a blackboard sound will become increasingly annoying and embarrassing with further driving, the early warning of worn brake pads can head off some expensive damage. If a brake pad loses most or all of its friction material, its steel backing and/or the rivets attaching the friction material will cause severe damage to the brake rotor, along with decreased stopping ability.

Audible wear sensors are found on some but not all brake pads. Higher-end vehicles typically use an electrical sensor that illuminates a warning light when pad thickness significantly decreases, rather than subjecting the driver to an awkward sound. This probe-type of wear sensor requires replacement after activation for about $10-$40 apiece. Other warning light-type sensors are embedded within the brake pad, making replacement more straightforward.

A tab-type sensor can make noise in the way you described because brake pads ride just a hair away from the brake rotor, and flexing of both parts while driving or braking can cause intermittent contact. As your pads wear further, the noise will become louder and more continuous, to the point you won't want to drive the car. The good news is you still have perhaps a month of driving remaining before this happens, and at least several more months of unimpaired brake operation.

If you're considering a brief delay in having the brakes looked at, I'd feel better knowing the cause was in fact a wear sensor rather than something else that may require more immediate attention. Many wheels have sufficiently large gaps between the spokes to allow a nice view of the brake caliper and rotor. If so, the edge of the outer brake pad is usually visible if the wheel is rotated just right. Thickness of the friction material on a new brake pad is a bit greater than that of a pencil. If you see it's less than one-third of this dimension, or if the gap between the pad's metal backing and the rotor if the friction material isn't visible, there's a good chance a wear sensor is signaling or will be soon. Inner brake pads typically wear at a slightly greater rate than the outers, so a sort-of-thin outer pad means it's time for brakes now.

Brad Bergholdt is an automotive technology instructor at Evergreen Valley College in San Jose, Calif. Readers may send him email at under-the-hood@earthlink.net; he cannot make personal replies.

High-mileage Ford reluctant to start

By PAUL BRAND
STAR TRIBUNE (MINNEAPOLIS)

QUESTION: I have a 2000 V-6 Ford Explorer with 103,000 miles. Several times a week when I try to start it, the vehicle will turn over strongly but refuse to start. Then, after five to 10 attempts, it kicks in.

Most recently, it turned over and almost started, then wouldn't stay running. It did this three times until it finally started and ran fine. In the past three weeks, I had had it tuned up, replaced the plug wires and installed a new, powerful battery. The problem continues to worsen. Any ideas?

ANSWER: Three likely suspects come to mind: vacuum leaks, low (or no) fuel pressure or a faulty idle air control valve. Attaching a mechanical fuel-pressure gauge to the pressure relief valve on the fuel rail for an overnight cold-start test may reveal low or no fuel pressure from an inoperative or weak fuel pump. The repeat cycling of the key may eventually cause the pump to start. Pounding on the bottom of the fuel tank with a rubber mallet while cranking the engine may also start the pump — and confirm a "tired" pump.

My Alldata automotive database pulled up Ford bulletin 03-3-5, outlining a test for checking the duty cycle of the idle air control. If the duty cycle is high, check the electrical connections for the valve. If the duty cycle is low, look for a vacuum leak.

■ ■ ■ ■

Q: My El Camino has an oil pressure gauge that flickers when you first turn on the key. The needle goes to max and then back to zero, where it quivers a bit. Once you start the car, the needle flickers and then settles down at 35 to 40 pounds per square inch. It quivers as I accelerate or decelerate. I think it may be the sending unit, but I'm not sure where it is. Could I remove it and thread in a mechanical oil gauge and see if it flickers?

A: Yes. On most older, small-block Chevrolet engines, the electrical oil sending unit sits just above the oil filter or at the top rear of the block. To test the sending unit, unplug the wire, then turn on the key without starting the engine. With the wire disconnected, the gauge should move all the way in one direction and stay there. Then ground the wire connector to the block; the needle should move all the way in the other direction and stay there. There should be no quivering.

If the gauge reacts properly to this test, the problem is likely the sending unit. If the gauge flickers or doesn't react correctly, it might be the gauge itself.

I like your idea of installing a mechanical oil pressure gauge; no crafty electrons to confuse the issue over oil pressure. In fact, with the correct "T" fitting, you can keep both the sending unit and a mechanical gauge.

And finally, make sure there's a solid electrical ground with no resistance between the engine and chassis.

■ ■ ■ ■

Q: A month ago, I had the rear differential fluid in my wife's 2009 Acura MDX replaced with "premium" automatic transmission fluid at a drive-through oil-change shop. They also replaced the transfer case fluid with "high performance" 80W-90 gear oil. Am I compromising the integrity of the MDX differential by using "premium" transmission fluid? Should I have it replaced with the Acura brand fluid to maintain lubrication and possibly my warranty? Also, is "high performance" 80W-90 gear oil a proper replacement for the MDX transfer?

A: Acura recommends GL4 or GL5 SAE 90 or SAE 80W-90 gear oil for the transfer case, so no issues there. Acura specifically recommends their DPSF all-wheel drive fluid for the differential, but it allows ATF-Z1 for topping up the unit. It's your call, but unless the "premium" ATF meets Acura's specs, I'd stick with the carmaker's fluid.

Paul Brand, author of How to Repair Your Car*, is an automotive troubleshooter, driving instructor and former race-car driver. Readers may write to him at: Star Tribune, 425 Portland Ave. S., Minneapolis, Minn. 55488 or via email at paulbrand@startribune.com. Please explain the problem in detail and include a daytime phone number. It isn't always possible to send a personal reply.*

Life & Style

AP

In this Dec. 9, 2007 file photo, then-Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., reacts as Oprah Winfrey introduces him to the crowd at a rally in Manchester, N.H. Hollywood, as everyone knows, loves the Next Big Thing.

Hollywood's take on Obama: Less gushing this time

NEW YORK (AP)—Hollywood loves the Next Big Thing, and four years ago, that was Barack Obama, the equivalent of a breakout movie star.

"He is 'The One,'" said Oprah Winfrey, his biggest and most influential celebrity champion.

"The best candidate I've ever seen," said George Clooney.

Halle Berry said she'd "collect paper cups off the ground to make his pathway clear." Black Eyed Peas frontman will.i.am chimed in with the famous "Yes We Can" video.

But you can't be the Next Big Thing twice and as a new election year dawns, there's clearly a different mood in heavily Democratic Hollywood.

That means less gushing, not to mention snippets of criticism, most prominently from actor Matt Damon, who campaigned for Obama last time but now makes no secret of his disillusionment.

"I think he misinterpreted his mandate," Damon said earlier this year. He recently told Elle magazine the country would have been better off with a one-term president with guts, although he used a saltier word.

The adulation of the 2008 election may be significantly muted among Hollywood liberals, as with liberals elsewhere, but Obama's supporters say that's only natural, given the circumstances. Fundraisers there say that events have been selling out and there's plenty of enthusiasm.

They also say the nation has focused on the GOP race to pick a challenger to Obama and that once that choice is made, the Democratic base will become energized.

"The moment the Republicans have their nominee is when you're going to see anyone still on the fence jump in," says Chad Griffin, a Los Angeles-based communications strategist and Democratic fundraiser. "Once you have a head-to-head matchup, the contrast will be grand."

Numbers compiled by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics show that while overall political contributions were up in Hollywood for the first three-quarters of this year compared with the same period four years ago, contributions to Democrats were slightly down.

According to the group, the movie, television and recording industries gave $17,639,267 in the first three-quarters to federal candidates and parties. The breakdown was 71 percent to the Democrats and 29 percent to Republicans, as opposed to $15,642,561 four years ago, when 77 percent went to the Democrats and 23 percent to Republicans.

But numbers for the Democrats were down by more than $2.5 million from four years ago—$9,249,303 this year compared with $11,966,077 four years ago.

Obama's fundraisers note that four years ago, Obama was locked in a tense primary battle with Hillary Rodham Clinton, and primaries drive early fundraising.

"A re-election is always different," says Andy Spahn, a longtime political adviser to one of the top Democratic fundraisers in the nation, DreamWorks co-founder Jeffrey Katzenberg, along with his partners Steven Spielberg and David Geffen.

He calls the current mood among Hollywood Democrats a "matured enthusiasm," but says support is strong.

Though Damon's remarks about the president have been the most pointed, other celebrities have expressed disappointment, or at least mild disillusionment.

"I love the president like most of us," Sean "Diddy" Combs told Source magazine this year. "I just want the president to do better." And will.i.am, creator of that viral video that ended with the word "HOPE," told The New York Times earlier this year: "I don't want to hope anymore." Asked if he was disappointed in Obama, he said: "I don't feel disappointed. I feel like, Argggh! Speak louder! I feel like, Do something!"

What about core Obama celebrity supporters Clooney and Winfrey? Far from being disillusioned with Obama, Clooney said recently: "I'm disillusioned by the people who are disillusioned by Obama."

"Democrats eat their own," the actor said. "I'm a firm believer in sticking by and sticking up for the people whom you've elected." He went on to list the accomplishments of the Obama administration, wondering why Democrats weren't selling them better.

Winfrey, credited with helping Obama win over many women in 2008, told Politico in August: "I'm in his corner for whatever he needs me to do."

There already have been plenty of celebrities hosting or showing up at Obama fundraising events. Actress Eva Longoria hosted one at the home of Melanie Griffith and Antonio Banderas. Lady Gaga attended a September fundraiser at the home of Facebook's chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg. Alicia Keys performed at a New York fundraiser.

Over the summer, film executive Harvey Weinstein held a Manhattan event sprinkled with celebrities including Keys, Jimmy Fallon, and Gwyneth Paltrow and husband Chris Martin. A 50th birthday-themed fundraiser in Chicago featured performances by Jennifer Hudson, Herbie Hancock and the band OK Go.

Of course, celebrity support isn't always a win-win for a candidate. Just as Obama's opponents in 2008 tried to use his taste for arugula to paint him as elitist, they tried to use his celebrity connections to imply he was lightweight, all pizazz and no substance—most pointedly in an ad tenuously linking him to Paris Hilton and Britney Spears.

The tactic seemed to scare Obama's campaign enough to play down the role of celebrities at the Democratic convention that summer. Will the campaign similarly seek to downplay the celebrity role this time?

"Celebrities are helpful in terms of exciting a base," says Griffin, the fundraiser. "I don't think the president will have any shortage of surrogates."

The gospel on celebrity and pop culture

Chris Brown and Rihanna sending each other love tweets?

Chris Brown and Rihanna, whose romance had a spectacularly violent and public flame-out in 2009, appear to be hooking up again—at least on Twitter.

The singers sent a few public tweets Thursday that seemed to have very specific audiences.

At 4:06 p.m., Brown, who follows Rihanna on Twitter and vice-versa, tweeted, "Love U more than u know!" A minute later, Rihanna tweeted, "I'll always love u #1LOVE."

This isn't the first time the two parties, who have been separated by a court-mandated restraining order that requires Brown stay 50 yards away from Rihanna at all times, have shown signs of looking for a reunion.

On Dec. 15, Chris Brown's mother, Joyce Hawkins, tweeted, "HELLO LADY I MISS YOU AND LOVE YOU!!!!! YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE!!!!"

While that in itself isn't unusual (90 percent of "Mombreezy's" tweets involve love in some capacity) this one was matched a short time later by Rihanna, who tweeted, "Miss+Love u 2."

Brown and Rihanna's relationship came to a very public end when Brown was arrested on domestic assault charges after an incident with Rihanna, which left her with visible injuries on her face and body. Brown later pleaded guilty to a felony and accepted a plea deal of community service and five years' formal probation. Rihanna has since said she's still a Chris Brown fan.

Will the couple reunite? Not without a return visit to court. The judge's restraining order is in place until 2014. ***(Patrick Kevin Day)***

AP

Rihanna attends the 50th Annual Grammy Awards held at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, California, February 10, 2008. Rihanna and Jay-Z's "Umbrella" won Best Rap/Sung Collaboration.

Joseph Gordon-Levitt continues his singing spree

On the heels of Joseph Gordon-Levitt's charming New Year's Eve duet with Zooey Deschanel, the "Dark Knight Rises" actor can't stop singing.

Gordon-Levitt stopped by The Sayers Club in Hollywood on Thursday, where the popular weekly Corzo Sessions from Jason Scoppa inspires many a bold name to get up and perform.

Joseph arrived with friends for the live music jam and wound up stealing the show with his rendition of the Top Notes classic "Twist and Shout."

Other performances included Gene Simmons' spawn Nick belting The Doors track "L.A. Woman" and Amie Miriello taking on a Cold War Kids cover.

Perhaps Levitt was just warming up for Saturday's big New Year's Eve night out. ***(Matt Donnelly)***

Robert Pattinson: $12K in guitars (but no KStew) for Christmas

Though Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart spent the Christmas holidays with their respective families this year—on different continents—the couple exchanged some impressive gifts to serve as romantic reminders.

For Pattinson, Stewart nabbed two vintage guitars (a 1959 Fender Jazzmaster and a 1947 K&F Lap Steel, for you music buffs). The instruments cost something to the tune of $12,000.

"She said, 'He's gonna ... when he sees them!'" the owner of Norman's Rare Guitars in Tarzana, Calif., told Us Weekly, which first reported the "Twilight Saga" heroine's purchase.

Pattinson was spotted on Christmas Eve in London palling around with his close friend Tom Sturridge's ex-girlfriend. Stewart was said to be in stateside in Los Angeles with her family.

Stewart got some creature comforts of her own, however, courtesy of her "Water for Elephants" hunk: around $500 worth of vintage furniture—lamps and a wooden bench—from an L.A. operation called TINI, reports popsugar.com.

As any avid follower of the couple knows, their Christmas separation isn't anything to raise an eyebrow over: These two have a New Year's Eve tradition. For the past two years they've done their own little countdown on the modest Isle of Wight, a seaside haven that offers them added privacy. ***(Matt Donnelly)***

Source: Ministry of Gossip: http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/gossip/

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The Darkest Hour
Friday thru Sunday 1:25 4:25 7:25 9:40
Monday 1:25 4:25 7:25
Tuesday thru Thursday 4:25 7:25
Emile Hirsch, Olivia Thirlby
Science, Fiction • Rated PG 13

Synopsis
Director Chris Gorak (Right at Your Door) teams with producer Timur Bekmambetov for this tense apocalyptic thriller centering on the fight for survival waged by five youths who find themselves stranded in Moscow during an alien invasion. As the invisible extraterrestrials absorb all of Earth's energy and life forms, finding a means of escaping the unstoppable attackers becomes a seemingly impossible task. Emile Hirsch, Olivia Thirlby, and Max Minghella star.

We Bought A Zoo
Friday thru Sunday 1:10 4:10 7:10 9:30
Monday 1:10 4:10 7:10
Tuesday thru Thursday 4:10 7:10
Matt Damon, Scarlett Johansson
Comedy, Drama • Rated PG

Synopsis
A widower (Matt Damon) purchases a zoo in order to bring his family back together in this Twentieth Century Fox adaptation of Benjamin Mee's autobiographical memoir. Cameron Crowe (Almost Famous) writes and directs based on a script by Aline Brosh McKenna.

The Adventure of Tintin
Friday thru Sunday 1:30 4:30 7:30 9:50
Monday 1:30 4:30 7:30
Tuesday thru Thursday 4:30 7:30
Jamie Bell, Andy Serkis
Adventure • Rated PG

Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol
Friday thru Sunday 1:15 4:15 7:15 9:55
Monday 1:15 4:15 7:15
Tuesday thru Thursday 4:15 7:15
Tom Cruise, Jeremy Renner
Spy film, Action • Rated PG 13

The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo
Friday thru Sunday 1:00 4:00 7:00 10:00
Monday 1:00 4:00 7:00
Tuesday thru Thursday 4:00 7:00
Daniel Craig, Rooney Mara
Thriller • Rated R

Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked
Friday thru Sunday 1:20 4:20 7:20 9:35
Monday 1:20 4:20 7:20
Tuesday thru Thursday 4:20 7:20
Jason Lee
Children's/family • Rated G

Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows
Friday thru Sunday 1:05 4:05 7:05 9:45
Monday 1:05 4:05 7:05
Tuesday thru Thursday 4:05 7:05
Robert Downey, Jr. Jude Law
Action, Mystery • Rated PG 13

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Russell Brand, Katy Perry to divorce

LOS ANGELES (AP)—British actor-comedian Russell Brand is divorcing "California Gurls" songstress Katy Perry after 14 months of what had appeared to be one of Hollywood's happier marriages.

"Sadly, Katy and I are ending our marriage," Brand said in a statement to The Associated Press on Friday. "I'll always adore her and I know we'll remain friends."

Brand, 36, offered no other details, but in papers filed Friday in Los Angeles Superior Court, he cited irreconcilable differences.

He and the 27-year-old pop singer were married in October 2010 at a resort inside a tiger reserve in India, and their mutual affection had become a rather sweet feature of the celebrity circuit.

The couple announced their engagement in January 2010 after meeting at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards, where Brand hosted and she performed.

The comedian, who once struggled with substance abuse and sex addiction, was effusive about his bride while promoting projects earlier this year, saying marrying Perry has "given me much more strength in what I do."

"For a long while, what I do professionally was all that mattered to me really," he said in March. "Now I think, well, whatever I do, I'll just go back to her, and that's incredibly comforting."

Perry praised her husband backstage at the 2011 VMAs in August, where she won three awards and he offered a tribute to Amy Winehouse.

"I'm proud of him, whatever comes out of his mouth, and sometimes it's very colorful, right?" Perry said of Brand. "That's why I married him, because he's smart and I learn a lot."

Attorneys for Perry, whose name is listed as Katheryn Elizabeth Hudson in the divorce papers, did not respond Friday to calls seeking comment.

The Internet had been abuzz recently with rumors about possible trouble for the couple after they were seen during the holidays without their wedding rings.

Perry's run of No. 1 singles earned her the distinction of becoming MTV's first artist of the year earlier this month. She hosted "Saturday Night Live" on Dec. 10 and gave no indication of any marital woes.

Brand's recent film credits include "Arthur," "Hop" and "Get Him to the Greek." He is among the ensemble starring alongside Tom Cruise in "Rock of Ages," set for release next year.

Both Brand and Perry were absent Friday from Twitter, where they often shared kind words for each other.

AP

In this Tuesday, April 19, 2011 file photo, British actor Russell Brand and his wife Katy Perry arrive for the European premiere of Arthur, in London.

Cruise's 'Mission' stays on top with $31.3M

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Tom Cruise's new mission remains impossible to beat at the box office.

Studio estimates Sunday placed "Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol" in the No. 1 spot for the second-straight weekend with $31.3 million. With a $134.1 million domestic total, it's the first $100 million hit with Cruise in the lead role since 2006's "Mission: Impossible III."

The Paramount release led a solid New Year's weekend as Hollywood managed fair business to end a sluggish year on a more promising note for 2012. Domestic revenues closed out at $10.22 billion for 2011, down 3.4 percent from 2010's, according to box-office tracker Hollywood.com.

That was a slight improvement over Hollywood.com's projections a week earlier, when Hollywood was limping through the normally busy holiday season with a lineup of underachieving movies.

"This week was a pleasant surprise," said Hollywood.com analyst Paul Dergarabedian. "Last week, we were really pretty gloom and doom, but this final push at the end of the year was stronger than expected. It's a good way to head into 2012, with at least a little bit of momentum at the box office."

Still, movie admissions were down sharply for the second year in a row. Factoring in higher ticket prices, domestic attendance slipped to 1.28 billion in 2011, off 4.2 percent from 2010 admissions and the smallest audiences Hollywood has had since 1995, according to Hollywood.com.

Hollywood started the year in a deep rut, with domestic revenues trailing 2010's by 20 percent or more as a weak first quarter fell far short of the previous year's spectacular results for the sci-fi sensation "Avatar."

Studios nearly dug themselves out from that deficit over the summer, but business lagged through the fall and holidays as audiences had a ho-hum response to most movies.

Some studio executives had predicted record revenues for 2011. The movies themselves may simply have held less appeal to fans than expected, though audiences also could be skipping trips to theaters to watch movies on big-screen home setups or to play with the countless entertainment gadgets now on the market. Viewers can watch films at home or on portable devices for a fraction of the cost of going to theaters.

The industry is looking ahead to an impressive lineup to turn things around this year. Big titles include the superhero tales "The Dark Knight Rises," "The Amazing Spider-Man" and "The Avengers"; the latest in the animated franchises "Ice Age" and "Madagascar," along with "Brave," the new adventure from animation master Pixar; Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones' "Men in Black 3"; Daniel Craig's new James Bond thriller "Skyfall"; Johnny Depp's vampire story "Dark Shadows"; Ridley Scott's "Prometheus," a cousin to his sci-fi classic "Alien"; and Peter Jackson's "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey," the first in a two-part prequel to his "Lord of the Rings" films.

The rest of this weekend's top-three remained unchanged. Robert Downey Jr.'s "Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows," from Warner Bros., finished second again with $22.1 million, raising its domestic total to $132.1 million.

The 20th Century Fox family sequel "Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked" was still at No. 3 with $18.3 million to lift its haul to $94.6 million.

In its first full weekend, Steven Spielberg's World War I epic "War Horse" came in fourth with $16.9 million, pushing its domestic total to $43 million.

At No. 5 was David Fincher's thriller "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" with $16.3 million. The Sony release, which stars Daniel Craig and Rooney Mara, now stands at $57.1 million domestically.

Cameron Crowe's family tale "We Bought a Zoo," featuring Matt Damon and Scarlett Johansson, finished at No. 6 with $14.3 million. Released by 20th Century Fox, the movie raised its total to $41.8 million.

Rounding out the top films was Spielberg and producer Jackson's animated action story "The Adventures of Tintin" at No. 7 with $12 million. The Paramount release lifted its domestic sum to $47.8 million.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Hollywood.com. Where available, latest international numbers are also included. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "**Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol,**" $31.3 million.
2. "**Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows**," $22.1 million.
3. "**Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked**," $18.3 million.
4. "**War Horse**," $16.9 million.
5. "**The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo**," $16.3 million.
6. "**We Bought a Zoo**," $14.3 million.
7. "**The Adventures of Tintin**," $12 million.
8. "**New Year's Eve**," $6.7 million.
9. "**The Darkest Hour**," $4.3 million.
10. "**The Descendants**," $3.7 million.

Queen's honors list includes actress Bonham Carter

LONDON (AP)—Oscar-nominated actress Helena Bonham Carter, famed for playing quirky characters as well as British royalty, joins a former prisoner, a reality TV guru and several Olympics organizers on the list of people being awarded honors by Queen Elizabeth II this New Year.

Bonham Carter missed out on the best supporting actress Oscar for her role as Queen Elizabeth, the supportive wife of King George VI in "The King's Speech." Her other major roles have included characters in films such as "Planet of the Apes" and "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory."

The queen, who is the daughter of King George VI and Elizabeth, awarded Bonham Carter a CBE, short for Commanders of the Order of the British Empire. Bonham Carter has said she is dedicating the CBE to her late father.

Businessman Gerald Ronson, who was convicted in 1990 for a share-trading scandal and served six months of a one-year jail sentence, was awarded a CBE for his services to charity. Ronson fought a long legal battle to clear his name, and although the European Court of Human Rights later ruled his trial was unfair, Britain's highest appeal court never overturned his conviction. He now runs property company Heron International and is a leading philanthropist.

Peter Bazalgette, who brought the show "Big Brother" to the U.K. and devised a string of much-copied lifestyle and reality shows, was made a knight. Professor Geoffrey Hill, who has been described as the greatest living poet in the English language, also became a knight.

Britain's honors are bestowed twice a year by the monarch—at New Year's and on her official birthday in June. Recipients are selected by committees of civil servants from nominations made by the government and the public.

In descending order, the honors are knighthoods, CBE, OBE—an Officer of the Order of the British Empire- and MBE—Member of the Order of the British Empire. Knights are addressed as "sir" or "dame." Recipients of the other honors have no title but can put the letters after their names.

The queen or occasionally another member of the royal family presents the award at a ceremony known as an "investiture." Several investitures are held at Buckingham Palace in London throughout the year.

Most of the honors go to people who are not in the limelight, for services to community or industry, but they also reward a sprinkling of famous faces.

As Britain prepares for the 2012 London Olympics, several organizers were recognized for their work.

John Armitt, chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority, which is building the venues and infrastructure of the games, was made a knight for services to engineering and construction. Charles Allen, who is in charge of making sure the whole country benefits from the games, was also made a knight. Howard Shiplee, director of construction at the ODA, was made a CBE.

Record producer Steve Lillywhite, who worked with rock groups such as U2, The Rolling Stones and The Smiths, was awarded a CBE for services to music.

Sky News journalist Alex Crawford, who filmed from a newly liberated Tripoli after traveling there with Libyan fighters who had overthrown Moammar Gadhafi's regime, was awarded an OBE.

Etta James condition better, taken off respirator

RIVERSIDE, Calif. (AP)—Etta James' manager says the terminally ill blues singer is breathing on her own after being taken off a respirator.

Lupe De Leon says Friday that the change in her condition is great news and that the singer's blood pressure is normal.

De Leon says James was put on a respirator when she was hospitalized in Southern California on Dec. 21 because she was having trouble breathing.

James has been diagnosed with terminal leukemia and is suffering from dementia. She has been receiving mostly at-home care.

Earlier this month, a judge set aside $350,000 for her medical care. James is best known for the hit "At Last."

Deschanel, Gordon-Levitt post New Year's Eve duet

In this Sunday, Nov. 8, 2009 file photo, actress Zooey Deschanel, right, and actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt arrive at the Hamilton Behind the Camera Awards in Los Angeles. AP

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Zooey Deschanel and Joseph Gordon-Levitt are curious about your New Year's Eve plans.

The two actors perform a duet in a video posted this week on YouTube, musically asking, "What are you doing New Year's Eve?"

She plays ukulele and he plays guitar in the two-minute video of the 1947 jazz song.

Deschanel calls her "(500) Days of Summer" co-star "simply the best" in a note accompanying the video.

The two actors don't reveal their New Year's Eve plans in the clip, but they will be celebrating together in 2012. Both are nominated for Golden Globe Awards: she for actress in a TV comedy for "New Girl," and he for his lead role in the film "50/50."

Hugh Jackman on Broadway translates into cold cash

NEW YORK (AP)—Hugh Jackman has left Broadway with a lot of broken hearts—and records.

The hunky Australian actor's one-man Broadway concert show closed on Sunday afternoon at the Broadhurst Theatre after having earned $2,057,354 in its final week, the highest weekly gross recorded by the Shubert Organization, which owns the Broadhurst and 16 other Broadway theaters.

Over its 10-week run, Jackman earned a whopping $14,638,428, producers said. He now owns 10 of the 11 top grossing weeks at the Broadhurst.

Jackman, best known for being the hairy Wolverine in "The X-Men" franchise, routinely sold out the 1,176-seat theater and usually posted weekly grosses of $1.5 million, often higher than rival musicals such as "Jersey Boys," "Mama Mia!" "How to Succeed in Business," "Anything Goes" and "Follies."

Only "Wicked" and "The Lion King," produced by other organizations, consistently outdid Jackman. But those shows also had much higher overhead costs.

The previous record at the Broadhurst was held by the Al Pacino-led "The Merchant of Venice," which took in $1,175,750 earlier this year. Until now, the Shubert Organization's one-week biggest haul was "Billy Elliot," which earned $1,663,895 during an eight-show stretch last year.

During the run, Jackman raised a record $1,789,580 for the charity Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. The run "not only confirms him as one of the most bankable stars in Broadway's history but also as a fundraiser," producer Robert Fox said.

Jackman

Backed by an 18-piece orchestra and six leggy dancers, a charming Jackman belted out about two dozen musical theater songs in "Hugh Jackman, Back on Broadway." It was his third time on the Great White Way, following "The Boy From Oz" in 2003 and the play "A Steady Rain" with Daniel Craig in 2009.

The show featured his interpretations of songs ranging from the sexy R&B tune "Fever" to "Rock Island," from "The Music Man" to a medley of classic movie songs such as "Singin' in the Rain" and "Luck Be a Lady." The average ticket went for $160, with top premiums going for $350.

Some of the highlights included the eight-minute "Soliloquy" from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "Carousel," and a collection of songs from his Tony Award-winning turn in "The Boy From Oz" while wearing Peter Allen-inspired matching gold lame pants and jacket, and gold shoes.

Jackman's other stage credits include Australian productions of "Sunset Boulevard" and "Beauty and the Beast." In London he starred as Curly in Trevor Nunn's staging of Rodgers & Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!" Next year, he plans to star in a version of the musical "Les Miserables."

Fate of frozen embryos puts couple at crossroads

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
FROM UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

DEAR ABBY: My husband and I have been married 11 years. We went through eight years of fertility treatments before having our twins. When they were a year old, we discovered I was pregnant with our third child. The twins are now 2 1/2 and the baby is almost a year old.

For the first time in our marriage, my husband and I are at an impasse. We have two embryos left and need to decide what to do. We either use them or destroy them. I think we need to give the embryos the chance they were meant to have. However, my husband is concerned only with the financial side of it as we have been living on one salary and things are tight.

My heart aches over this. Do I do what I believe is right and stand by my religious and moral beliefs, and take the chance my husband will resent me for the rest of our marriage? I'm afraid I'll resent him if I have to destroy them. I'd appreciate some words of wisdom.

DEADLOCKED IN NEW JERSEY

DEAR DEADLOCKED: This isn't an either/or question. I discussed it with Diane Goodman, the past president of the Academy of California Family Formation Lawyers, who suggests a third option. Your embryos could be donated for embryo adoption by a couple who have been unable to conceive, and who would love to raise them. For more information, you should contact an attorney who specializes in family formation, or contact the Snowflakes Frozen Embryo Adoption and Donation Program. Its phone number is 714-693-5437 and its website is www.nightlight.org.

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I am 29 and met my birth mother last month for the first time. She abandoned two other children besides me. "Angie" is an alcoholic and has cirrhosis of the liver. When I met her she was in rehab and had been sober for two weeks. The day after she was released she was rearrested for driving with a revoked license. The following day she was arrested for DUI.

It's obvious that my birth mother has a major addiction, and my heart breaks for her because she has no support system. Should I reach out and help her or continue on with my life? My friends and family are afraid I'll get hurt, but it's hard to sit back and do nothing. Any words of wisdom will help.

CONFUSED AND TORN IN ST. LOUIS

DEAR CONFUSED AND TORN: Before involving yourself any further with Angie, take some time to visit Al-Anon (listed in your phone directory) and Adult Children of Alcoholics (adultchildren.org). That you want to help her is laudable, but it's important that you fully understand what you're letting yourself in for if you do.

Much as you might wish to, you cannot "fix" other people—only they can do that. The Serenity Prayer from AA says it clearly: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." It applies to you.

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: My ex-wife, from whom I was divorced for many years, died recently. Our middle-aged daughter, who grew up in her mother's care, was unhappy that I chose not to attend the funeral. (Actually, I never considered going.)

Not only would plane fare have been a financial burden, my ex and I hadn't communicated with each other for more than 30 years. She remarried and I didn't.

Was I wrong for not being there? I don't understand our daughter's feelings in the matter.

MEANT NO DISRESPECT, MESA, ARIZ.

DEAR MEANT NO DISRESPECT: Funerals aren't for the deceased as much as they are for the living. Because you didn't mention whether you had maintained contact with your daughter since your divorce from her mother, I can only guess that she felt she needed your emotional support during that sad time, and that would explain her reaction to your absence.

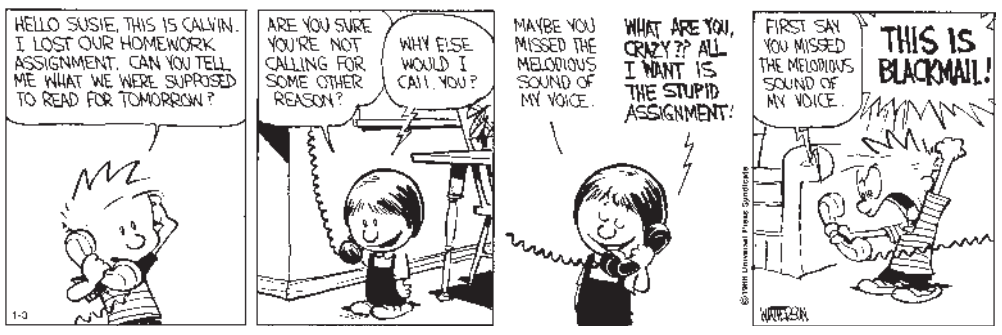
Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

To receive a collection of Abby's most memorable—and most frequently requested—poems and essays, send a business-sized, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for $6 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby—Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included in the price.)

Pastimes

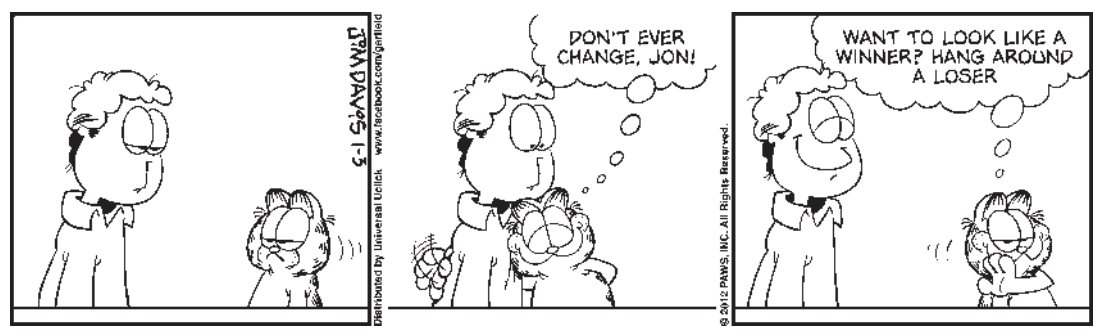
Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


HELLO SUSIE, THIS IS CALVIN. I LOST OUR HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT. CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO READ FOR TOMORROW?
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT CALLING FOR SOME OTHER REASON?
WHY ELSE WOULD I CALL, YOU?
MAYBE YOU MISSED THE MELODIOUS SOUND OF MY VOICE.
WHAT ARE YOU, CRAZY?? ALL I WANT IS THE STUPID ASSIGNMENT!
FIRST SAY YOU MISSED THE MELODIOUS SOUND OF MY VOICE.
THIS IS BLACKMAIL!

Garfield®

By Jim Davis



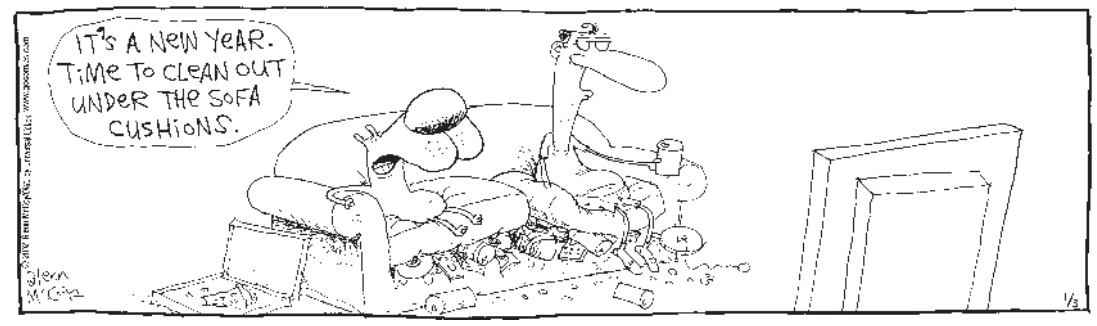
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

SO I'M WRITING MY MEMOIRS FOR MY GRANDKIDS.
THAT'S GREAT.
BUT I'M NOT A VERY GOOD WRITER.
THAT'S NOT SO GREAT.
I JUST WISH I COULD FIND A WRITER TO HELP ME.
UH-OH. TIME TO GO.
IT'S A SHAME I'D BE WILLING TO PAY WELL.
THAT'S GREAT!

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

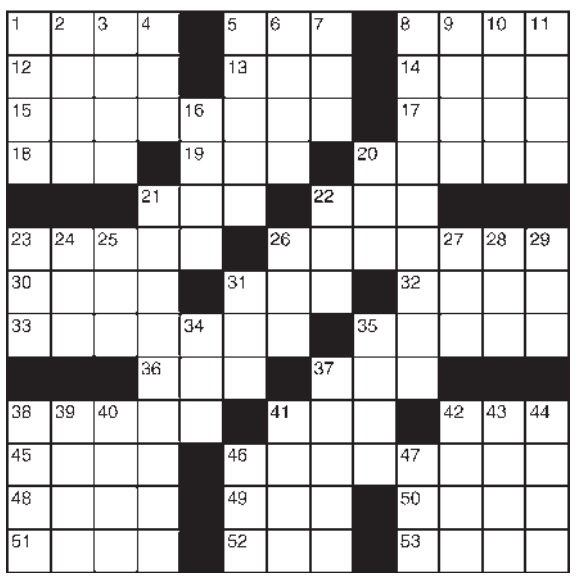
ACROSS
1 Level in a hierarchy
5 Lower limb
8 Tranquil
12 Burn soother
13 Hockey surface
14 Hodge-podge
15 Road on a cliff's face
17 Nevada city
18 Greek vowel
19 Carnival venue
20 Beginning
21 Private place to sleep?
22 Compete
23 Cookwear?
26 Guys
30 Back
31 Chicken —
32 Concept
33 Current generator for some engines
35 Confuse
36 A Gabor
37 Ph. bk. data
38 Wooden box
41 Ultra-modernist
42 Periodical, for short
45 Stereo setup
46 City in Ontario
48 "Oh, woe!"
49 Pt. of speech
50 Therefore
51 Impudent
52 Spelling contest
53 Physical

DOWN
1 Compete on a track
2 Greatly
3 Mrs. Nick Charles
4 Documentary filmmaker Burns
5 Within the law
6 Reverberate
7 "Golly!"
8 Roddy McDowall's "Planet of the Apes" role
9 Brewery products
10 Queue
11 Academic
16 Press
20 Lubricate
21 Musician in the brass section
22 Irritate
23 Upper limb
24 Shell game item
25 Tatter
26 Egg — yung
27 Peculiar
28 Become one
29 Utter
31 Sch. org.
34 Previous night
35 Apollo's landing site
37 Chutzpah
38 Bloke
39 Anger
40 Somewhere out there
41 Protuberance
42 Fraternal surname of comedy
43 Plankton component
44 Snatch, with "onto"
46 Taxi
47 Teeny

Solution time: 24 mins.

■	M	E	M	O	S	■	D	E	M	O	B	■
S	E	R	A	P	H	■	E	D	U	C	E	D
M	A	S	T	F	R	■	C	A	S	T	F	R
A	N	A	■	D	E	N	I	M	■	A	P	E
R	I	T	E	■	D	O	M	■	U	V	E	A
M	E	Z	Z	O	■	W	A	R	L	O	R	D
■	■	■	I	R	E	■	L	O	T	■	■	■
R	E	D	N	E	S	S	■	D	R	U	B	S
E	R	I	E	■	C	O	W	■	A	L	I	T
E	R	G	■	S	O	N	I	C	■	S	K	I
F	A	S	T	F	R	■	V	A	S	T	F	R
S	T	U	A	R	T	■	E	M	E	E	R	S
■	A	P	R	E	S	■	S	P	A	R	S	■

Saturday's answer 1-2



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18– only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Eli Manning, 31; Danica McKellar, 37; Mel Gibson, 56; Victoria Principal, 62.

Happy Birthday: You can advance if you put your mind, body and soul into an idea. Don't rely on others to help you get started. It's up to you to set your goals and go after them until your journey is complete. Good fortune is possible, along with greater stability and security. Your numbers are 12, 16, 20, 23, 28, 32, 45.

ARIES (*March 21-April 19*): Don't let the past come back to haunt you. Be upfront and deal with any issue that could damage your chance with someone interesting who could help you get ahead personally or professionally. Love is highlighted, and a commitment is apparent. ✪✪✪

TAURUS (*April 20-May 20*): You'll pick up valuable information easily and be able to turn it into a moneymaking commodity if you are quick to react to an opportunity you come across. Emotions will surface due to a misunderstanding with a colleague or loved one. ✪✪✪

GEMINI (*May 21-June 20*): Spend time and money making self-improvements that will help you feel more confident and will allow you to offer what you can to someone interested in forming a partnership with you. The more you know, the greater control you will have. ✪✪✪

CANCER (*June 21-July 22*): Don't let a bully dictate to you. You may have to call in a favor in order to cut ties with someone who is making your life difficult. Good fortune is apparent if you show strength of character and stand up for your rights. ✪✪✪✪

LEO (*July 23-Aug. 22*): You will excel if you keep things simple, to the point and under budget. Keep your feelings to yourself and focus more on being diplomatic about what you want and how you are going to go about getting it. ✪✪

VIRGO (*Aug. 23-Sept. 22*): You will excel intellectually by expanding your interests, knowledge and friendships. The more you engage in new events and activities, the further ahead you will get as the year progresses. Someone from your past will offer help. ✪✪✪✪✪

LIBRA (*Sept. 23-Oct. 22*): Do something that will make you feel good about you. Self-improvement projects or spending time with someone who boosts your ego will help you gain confidence and give you the courage to go after your personal and professional goals. ✪✪✪

SCORPIO (*Oct. 23-Nov. 21*): Be careful when dealing with emotional situations. Something could go wrong with your home and security if you aren't on top of what everyone else is doing. Don't take chances. Play to win. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS (*Nov. 22-Dec. 21*): Don't let what others say or do cause you grief or bring out the worst in you. Arguing will be a waste of time and will make you look bad. Focus on making changes at home that will make your life easier. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN (*Dec. 22-Jan. 19*): Make decisions that will improve your home and your lifestyle. It will be beneficial to raise your standards to call attention to what you do differently and more efficiently. An opportunity to start something new will pay off financially. ✪✪✪✪✪

AQUARIUS (*Jan. 20-Feb. 18*): Don't take on or divulge too much. Your plans will turn out far better if you work diligently on your own, controlling the outcome as you proceed. Someone from your past is likely to hurt your reputation if given the chance. ✪✪

PISCES (*Feb. 19-March 20*): Mix the old with the new and you'll discover what you should be striving to obtain in the future. You will get the help you need if you call in favors and ask people with specific talents to join your quest. ✪✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are steadfast, determined and dedicated. You strive for security.

Eugenia's Web sites: ***eugenialast.com*** *for confidential consultations,* ***myspace.com/eugenialast*** *for Eugenia's blog,* ***astroadvice.com*** *for fun*

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

	2			8			3	
3	9		7			1		4
					6		5	
	5					2		
9				6				1
		1					8	
	1		4					
5		6			8		1	9
	4			3			7	

Difficulty Level ★★ 1/03

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Last Saturday's SUDOKU Answer

1	4	6	8	2	3	5	7	9
7	2	3	9	5	1	4	6	8
5	9	8	7	4	6	3	1	2
8	6	9	3	1	7	2	5	4
2	1	5	4	9	8	7	3	6
4	3	7	5	6	2	8	9	1
6	5	2	1	7	4	9	8	3
9	8	4	6	3	5	1	2	7
3	7	1	2	8	9	6	4	5

Difficulty Level ★★★★ 1/3

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and **CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD.** The leftover letters spell the Wonderword.

"CASINO JACK" (FILM) **Solution: 8 letters**

J	C	R	W	E	I	N	B	E	R	G	R	P	I	E
E	A	A	O	E	L	B	A	I	T	O	G	E	N	G
S	S	C	R	N	A	N	N	A	G	M	A	P	T	N
U	I	Q	K	U	O	L	K	S	D	N	F	P	E	I
O	N	U	M	A	T	H	T	E	P	G	I	E	G	M
H	O	E	O	F	B	H	E	H	S	A	I	R	R	E
A	T	T	T	L	J	R	M	A	D	R	C	F	I	H
R	N	B	R	O	O	O	A	A	P	U	O	E	T	C
D	O	A	A	G	I	B	N	M	R	J	A	V	Y	S
W	R	L	D	R	R	L	B	O	O	S	A	R	A	H
I	O	L	I	A	R	E	L	Y	T	F	H	I	F	Ⓕ
C	T	O	N	N	D	Y	E	E	I	S	F	A	L	Ⓞ
K	R	M	G	G	E	A	E	N	G	S	E	A	L	Ⓤ
C	A	R	E	E	R	W	M	O	E	A	T	R	L	Ⓛ
B	U	S	I	N	E	S	S	M	A	N	L	D	P	L

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Abramoff, Adam, Anna, Bank, Barry, Businessman, Career, Casino, Fall, Favors, Foul, Fraud, Gifts, Golf, Greene, Hardwick, Heap, Honor, House, Illegal, Integrity, Jack, Jail, Jon, Lobbyist, Money, Negotiable, News, Pam, Pepper, Preston, Racquetball, Range, Reed, Ring, Ruth Marshall, Sarah, Scheming, Spacey, Tom, Toronto, Trading, Wealth, Weinberg

Yesterday's Answer: Handpieces

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Lower Navy Hill Apts. Newly renovated bldg., 3BR & 2BTH. Rooms w/A/C & fully furnished. Back-up generator. Free Wi-Fi, EPA Solar Water Heater. Laundry area. Nightime security. 235-6527/28 or 285-1317.

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- Maintains a close working relationship with the multi-disciplinary ESRD team of dialysis in planning for patients care and attends departmental staff meetings.
- Attends facility in-services, meetings and provides educational programs requested.
- Documents all tasks thoroughly in patient's medical records to maintain dietary records and statistics.
- Establishes yearly goals with Medical Director/Unit manager in relations to specialty program/service.
- Assists in the development, implementation and evaluation of dietary policies and procedures.
- Initiates and/or participates in patient education and treatment programs, such as developing dietary educational materials.
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Education/Experience:
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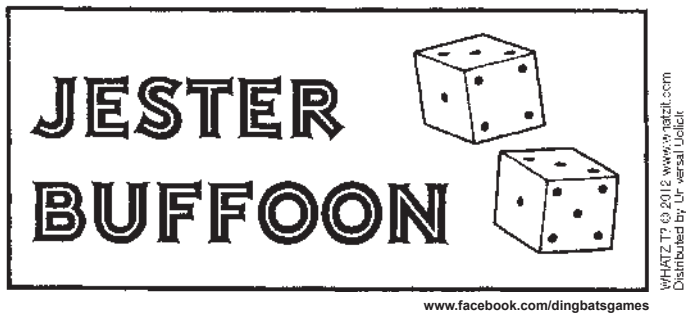

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Giants win NFC East, beat Cowboys, 31-14

EAST RUTHERFORD, New Jersey (AP)—Eli Manning threw three touchdown passes as the New York Giants won an all-or-nothing game to claim the final spot in the NFL playoffs, beating the Dallas Cowboys 31-14 on Sunday night.

The regular season went down to the last game, and it was coach Tom Coughlin's Giants (9-7) who won the NFC East and returned to the postseason for the first time since 2008.

The loss left Jerry Jones' Cowboys (8-8) out of the playoffs for the second straight year.

New York won three of its final four games and earned a wild-card home game next Sunday against the Atlanta Falcons (10-6).

The Cowboys lost four of their final five games in their first full season under coach Jason Garrett.

Patriots 49, Bills 21

In Foxborough, Tom Brady led the New England Patriots back from a three-touchdown deficit as they scored 49 straight points and clinched home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs with a 49-21 win over the Buffalo Bills on Sunday.

Brady finished the regular season with the second most yards passing in NFL history, 5,235, after throwing for 338. Drew Brees, who last week broke Dan Marino's record of 5,084 with the Miami Dolphins in 1984, added 389 Sunday for the New Orleans Saints and ended with 5,486.

The Patriots (13-3) finished the season with eight straight wins. But for the second straight game, they fell behind early. They beat the Miami Dolphins 27-24 after trailing 17-0 at halftime then rallied after the Bills (6-10) scored touchdowns on their first three possessions, drawing boos from the home fans.

Chiefs 7, Broncos 3

In Denver, Tim Tebow fell short in his latest comeback bid, yet his Denver Broncos are still going to the playoffs.

Former Bronco Kyle Orton got his revenge in leading the Kansas City Chiefs to a 7-3 win over Denver on Sunday, but it's the Broncos who clinched the AFC West and are headed to the postseason.

After congratulating their former starting quarterback, the Broncos celebrated the end to their six-year playoff drought once San Diego beat Oakland 38-26 later Sunday.

Losers of their last three games, the Broncos finished 8-8, same as the Raiders. They win their first division title since 2005 on a tiebreaker.

Ravens 24, Bengals 16

In Cincinnati, Ray Rice had a pair of long touchdown runs that gave the Ravens their third AFC North title and the No. 2 seed in the playoffs.

Baltimore (12-4) will get a first-round bye followed by a playoff game at home, where the Ravens are 8-0 this season.

Despite the loss, the Bengals (9-7) also got into the playoffs, securing the final wild card as the Jets and Broncos also lost. It's Cincinnati's third playoff appearance in the last 21 years.

With Paul Brown Stadium packed with Bengals fans for the first time all season, Rice made the biggest plays on a blustery afternoon. He had a career-best 70-yard touchdown run on the fourth play.

Rice also broke a 51-yard touchdown run with 5:41 to go and finished with 191 yards on 24 carries.

Chargers 38, Raiders 26

In Oakland, Philip Rivers threw three touchdown passes and Richard Goodman returned a kickoff 105 yards for another score as Oakland's playoff hopes ended.

The Raiders (8-8) went into the final day of the season needing to win and get help to end an eight-year playoff drought. They got the assistance they needed when Denver (8-8) lost 7-3 at home to Kansas City but were unable to do their part by beating the Chargers (8-8). The Broncos won the division based on record versus common opponents.

Steelers 13, Browns 9

At Cleveland, Isaac Redman replaced an injured Rashard Mendenhall and ran for a touchdown as Pittsburgh limped into the AFC playoffs.

Redman scored on a 7-yard run in the third quarter for the Steelers (12-4), who finished tied with Baltimore for first in the AFC North but lost the tiebreaker because the Ravens beat them twice.

The Steelers had to survive two fumbles by Redman in the second half and a pass into the end zone by the Browns (4-12) on the final play that was batted down.

Mendenhall hurt his right knee in the first quarter on a short run and didn't return. His status for the postseason is unknown.

Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger passed for 221 yards on a severely sprained ankle.

Saints 45, Panthers 17

In New Orleans, Drew Brees threw for 389 yards and five touchdowns as New Orleans set a slew of NFL and club records.

The NFL single-season records set by the Saints (13-3), who head into the playoffs on an eight-game winning streak, included offensive yards with 7,474, team yards passing with 5,347 and first downs with 416.

Brees, who was 28 of 35, finished with a record 468 completions this season, breaking Peyton Manning's 2010 mark of 450. He finished the season completing 71.6 percent of his passes, breaking his own 2009 NFL record 70.6 completion percentage.

Tight end Jimmy Graham had 97 yards receiving, finishing with an NFL record 1,310 for a tight end.

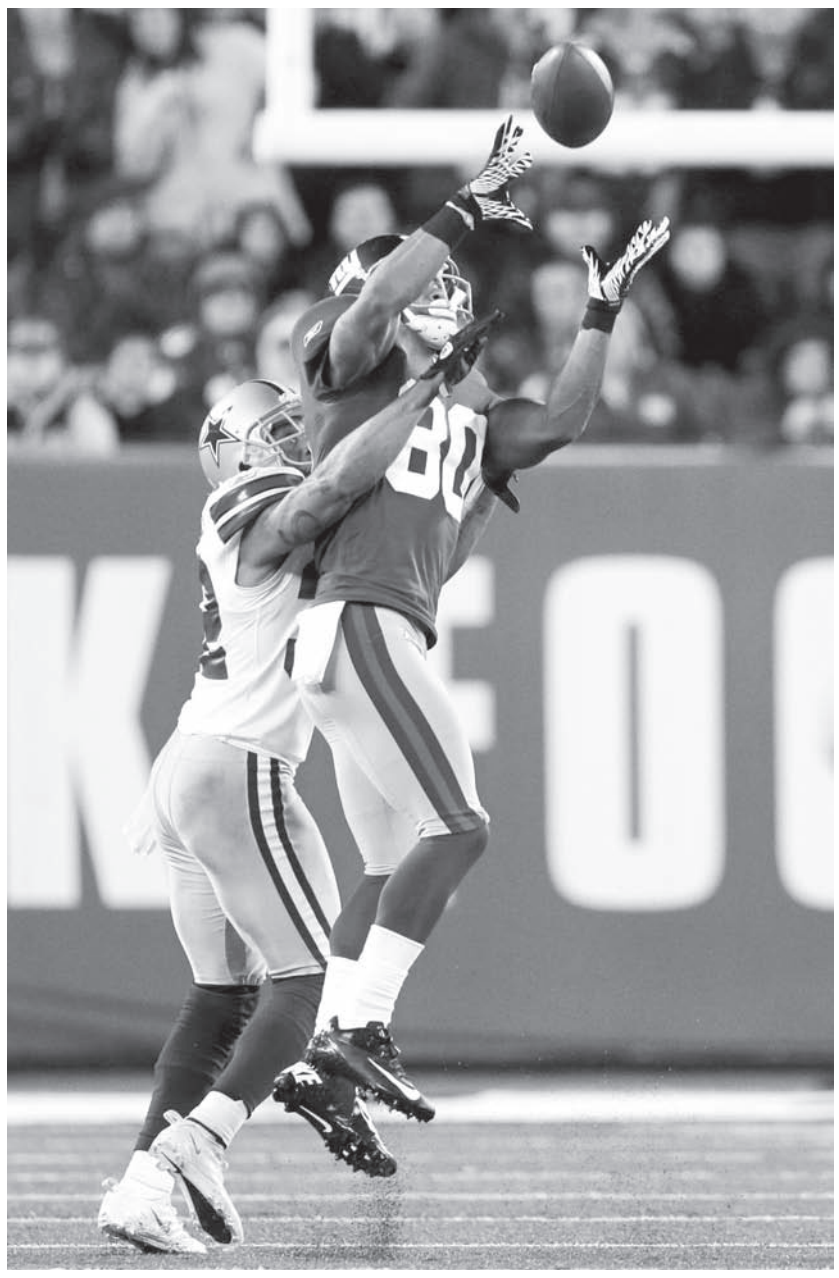
The Panthers finished 6-10.

Jaguars 19, Colts 13

In Jacksonville, Maurice Jones-Drew ran for a season-high 169 yards, clinching the NFL rushing title and breaking Fred Taylor's single-season franchise record in the Jaguars' victory.

The Jaguars (5-11) became the first AFC South opponent to sweep Indianapolis (2-14) since 2002 and gave outgoing owner Wayne Weaver a victory in his final game.

The Colts may have been the big winners, though. Indianapolis locked up the top pick in April's NFL draft, setting the stage to select Stanford quarterback Andrew Luck.



AP

New York Giants wide receiver Victor Cruz (80) pulls down a 44-yard pass against Dallas Cowboys cornerback Orlando Scandrick (32) during the second half of an NFL football game Sunday, Jan. 1, 2012, in East Rutherford, N.J.

Indy would have dropped to the No. 2 spot in the draft with a victory in Jacksonville. Instead, owner Jim Irsay will have the choice to draft Luck and give the team a young quarterback to join four-time MVP Peyton Manning.

Titans 23, Texans 22

In Houston, Matt Hasselbeck threw two touchdown passes as the Titans kept alive their playoff hopes.

The Titans (9-7) have their first winning record since 2008 in Mike Munchak's first season, but their postseason fate depended on the outcome of later games in Cincinnati, Oakland and Denver. Tennessee got some early help when the Jets lost in Miami.

Houston (10-6) will head into its first postseason on a three-game losing streak. The Texans were locked into the No. 3 seed in the AFC playoffs and coach Gary Kubiak played mostly reserves in the second half.

Rookie starter T.J. Yates left the game after one series with a shoulder injury and was replaced by Jake Delhomme. Kubiak said Yates could have returned if necessary.

The Texans pulled within a point late in the game on a 5-yard TD pass by Delhomme, but failed on a 2-point conversion that would have won it.

Dolphins 19, Jets 17

In Miami, Mark Sanchez threw three interceptions and the Jets were eliminated from the AFC wild-card playoff race.

Each turnover led to a field goal, and the Jets gave up six third-down conversions during the Dolphins' 21-play, 94-yard drive for their only touchdown.

The Jets (8-8) came into the game needing a win along with losses by three other teams to reach the playoffs. Instead, they finished the season with three consecutive defeats, a big step backward for a team that reached the AFC title game each of the past two years.

The Dolphins (6-10) completed their third consecutive losing season, their longest such stretch since the 1960s.

Packers 45, Lions 41

In Green Bay, backup quarterback Matt Flynn threw a touchdown pass to Jermichael Finley with 1:10 left to finish off his record-setting day of 480 yards and six TD passes.

With Aaron Rodgers resting for the playoffs, Flynn set club single-game records for yards passing and touchdowns. It was an ideal afternoon for the Packers (15-1) who got to rest their starting quarterback and several other big-name players without losing momentum.

Flynn barely got the Packers past Matthew Stafford, who threw for 520 yards with five touchdowns and two interceptions. Playoff-bound Detroit (10-6), has lost 21 straight road games to the Packers, including the postseason.

Bears 17, Vikings 13

In Minneapolis, Charles Tillman's interception return in the second quarter gave Chicago (8-8) the lead, allowing the Bears to stop their five-game losing streak despite 3 1/2 sacks by Jared Allen.

Allen finished the season with 22 sacks, behind Michael Strahan's NFL mark of 22 1/2 for the Giants in 2001.

Joe Webb relieved Christian Ponder at quarterback for the Vikings (3-13) for the third time in the last month, but the scrambling Webb wasn't able to keep the Vikings from matching the worst record in franchise history.

Eagles 34, Redskins 10

In Philadelphia, Michael Vick threw three touchdown passes, including a 62-yarder to DeSean Jackson, as the Eagles closed the season with four straight wins.

The Eagles (8-8) are hoping to carry the momentum from their strong finish into next season. But they can't be satisfied after entering the year with Super Bowl aspirations.

It's the first time since 2007 that Philadelphia didn't qualify for the postseason and just the fourth time in coach Andy Reid's 13 seasons. The Eagles set a franchise record for total yards on offense with 6,386.

The Redskins (5-11) finished in last place in the NFC East for a franchise-worst fourth straight year. It was Mike Shanahan's worst full season in 18 years as a coach.

49ers 34, Rams 27

In St. Louis, Michael Crabtree caught two touchdown passes, one from kicker David Akers on a perfectly executed trick play, as San Francisco wrapped up the No. 2 playoff seed in the NFC and a first-round bye.

Crabtree and Vernon Davis had big days for a team short of pass catchers and Tarell Brown had a pair of interceptions that led to touchdowns as the 49ers (13-3) beat the Rams (2-14) for the second time the last five games.

Cardinals 23, Seahawks 20, OT

In Glendale, Larry Fitzgerald's spectacular one-handed grab set help up a 28-yard field goal by Jay Feely to give Arizona its fourth overtime victory at home in the last nine weeks of the season.

Arizona (8-8) finished the season 7-2 after a six-game losing streak left it 1-6. Seattle (7-9) had rallied to tie the game after trailing 20-10 early in the fourth quarter.

Fitzgerald caught nine passes for 149 yards after one reception for 2 yards in the first half. John Skelton completed 22 of 40 for 271 yards and a touchdown with one interception for Arizona.

Falcons 42, Buccaneers 24

In Atlanta, Julio Jones caught two touchdown passes in a span of 26 seconds, Michael Turner ran for two scores and Atlanta put up a team-record 42 first-half points to cruise to a 45-24 win over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Sunday to clinch the No. 5 seed in the NFC playoffs.

The Falcons (10-6) and Detroit (10-6) are the NFC wild-cards. Atlanta, which beat Detroit on Oct. 23, won the tiebreaker with the Lions for the more favorable seeding.

Josh Freeman threw two interceptions and lost a fumble in the first half as the Buccaneers (4-12) closed their season with their 10th straight loss, leaving the status of coach Raheem Morris in doubt.

Anderson scores 24, Magic rally past Raptors

ORLANDO, Florida (AP)—Ryan Anderson scored 24 points and led a fourth-quarter rally as the Orlando Magic beat Toronto 102-96 on Sunday night.

The Magic trailed by as many as 16 points, but went on a 16-0 run in the final period. Orlando shot 4 for 5 on 3-pointers during the burst, with Anderson making two of them, as the Magic took a 94-88 lead with 3:05 left.

Dwight Howard had 19 points and 15 rebounds for the Magic, who have won four straight since a season-opening loss to Oklahoma City. J.J. Redick added 21 points and Hedo Turkoglu had 15 points and seven assists.

Andrea Bargnani paced the Raptors with 28 points, and Jose Calderon had 18 points and 13 assists.

Celtics 94, Wizards 86

In Washington, Rajon Rondo had 18 points, 14 assists and 11 rebounds while Kevin Garnett had 24 points and nine rebounds to lead Boston over the winless Wizards.

The victory was the Celtics' second straight after losing their first three. Washington is 0-4.

John Wall, who was 10 for 37 from the field in Washington's first three games, was 6 for 13. He had 19 points, eight assists and seven rebounds.

JaVale McGee had 16 points and 14 rebounds for the Wizards. Nick Young had 18.

Heat 129, Bobcats 90

In Miami, Chris Bosh scored 20 of his 24 points in the first half as the Heat improved to 5-0 for the first time in franchise history.

The 129 points is the most scored by any NBA team so far this season and the 39-point victory margin matched the third-largest in Heat history. Dwyane Wade scored 22 points and LeBron James and Mario Chalmers each scored 16 for the Heat, who ran out to an 18-point lead after one quarter and never trailed.

DJ White scored 21 points and Kemba Walker finished with 17 for Charlotte, which lost its seventh straight regular-season meeting against Miami.

Cavaliers 98, Nets 82

In Cleveland, Antawn Jamison scored 23 points and the Cavaliers made 16 3-pointers in a win over New Jersey.

Kyrie Irving, the No. 1 pick in the draft, had 13 points, four assists and four rebounds for Cleveland (2-2).

Deron Williams led New Jersey (1-4) with 16 points. The Nets dropped their fourth straight game despite having all five starters score in double figures.

Cleveland made 16 of 26 shots from 3-point range, falling one short of the team record for 3s in a game. The Cavaliers made 17 3-pointers in the 2008 and '09 seasons.

Mavericks 99, Timberwolves 82

In Minneapolis, Kevin Love had 25 points and 17 rebounds and hit two important 3-pointers in the fourth quarter to help the Timberwolves end an 18-game losing streak dating deep into last season.

The young Wolves closed the game with a 15-0 run. They lost the last 15 games of last season and the first three of this year, meaning it's been 295 days since the franchise's last victory.

Ricky Rubio added 14 points and seven assists and Luke Ridnour scored 11 for the Timberwolves (1-3), who were winners for the first time under new coach Rick Adelman.

Dirk Nowitzki scored 21 points, but the defending champions have looked slow and sloppy in starting the season 1-4.

The Mavericks turned the ball over 17 times and Jason Terry, Jason Kidd and Lamar Odom combined to shoot 7 for 23.

AP

Toronto Raptors center Andrea Bargnani (7) looks for room around Orlando Magic forward Ryan Anderson (33) during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2012, in Orlando, Fla. Orlando won 102-96.

Bulls 104, Grizzlies 64

In Chicago, Carlos Boozer scored 17 points and grabbed 11 rebounds as the Bulls easily won their home opener.

Derrick Rose finished with 16 points after a slow start. Ronnie Brewer scored 17 with Richard Hamilton a late scratch because of a groin injury. But with Boozer dominating, the Bulls simply put this one away early.

Rudy Gay had just five points for Memphis. Zach Randolph bruised his right knee and scored only two points in 11 minutes. Josh Davis and Sam Young were the only Grizzlies to score in double figures, with 10 points apiece.

Nuggets 99, Lakers 90

In Denver, Danilo Gallinari scored 20 points and Ty Lawson had 17 points and 10 assists to help the Nuggets beat the Lakers.

Nene had 13 points for the Nuggets, who avenged a three-point loss to the Lakers in Los Angeles less than 24 hours earlier.

Pau Gasol had 20 points and 11 rebounds and Andrew Bynum had 18 points and 16 rebounds for the Lakers. Kobe Bryant scored 16 points on 6-of-28 shooting.

After a seesaw battle for most of the final period, the Nuggets scored the final 11 points to pull out the win.

Kings 96, Hornets 80

In Sacramento, Tyreke Evans had 27 points and Marcus Thornton scored 25 for the Kings in a victory over New Orleans.

Playing without DeMarcus Cousins, who demanded a trade prior to the game and was told by coach Paul Westphal to stay home, the Kings ended a three game skid. Cousins was among several players who expressed frustration with the team's poor play after a 114-92 loss to the New York Knicks on Saturday.

Tervor Ariza had 17 points for the Hornets, who have dropped two straight after opening the season with a pair of victories. Chris Kaman contributed 14 points and 15 rebounds, Emeka Okafor had 13 points and 12 rebounds, and Carl Landry had 12 points.

Clippers 93, Trailblazers 88

In Los Angeles, forward Blake Griffin's double-double pushed the Los Angeles Clippers to a 93-88 win over the Portland Trailblazers on Sunday night.

Griffin scored 20 points and also had registered ten rebounds as the Clippers withstood a fourth quarter rally by the 'Blazers to hang on for the victory.

Portland's Jamal Crawford led all scorers with 23 points in a losing effort.

Padres get Quentin from White Sox for 2 prospects

SAN DIEGO (AP)—Being traded from the Chicago White Sox to his hometown San Diego Padres couldn't have been any more convenient for All-Star outfielder Carlos Quentin.

"I get a call and they said I've been traded to San Diego. I'm already here," Quentin said on a conference call shortly after the trade was announced Saturday.

Four years after trading Quentin from Arizona to the White Sox, new Padres general manager Josh Byrnes is bringing him home.

Byrnes made his second bold move in two weeks when he acquired Quentin for two prospects.

"Trading him is pretty high on my list of regrets," Byrnes said. "That group in Arizona had a lot of talent. Carlos always stood out for his intensity and his style of play. Having a chance to get him back became very appealing here this offseason."

The trade is expected to bolster San Diego's offense, which was dreadful as the Padres finished last in the NL West at 71-91, 23 games behind the Diamondbacks. Quentin has four consecutive 20-homer seasons, including 36 in 2008.

"Improving our offense is a priority this offseason and the acquisition of Carlos gives us a proven middle-of-the-order bat," Byrnes said. "We specifically targeted Carlos because of his production and his hard-nosed style of play."

While Quentin started the last two seasons in right field for the White Sox, he's penciled into left field with the Padres.

The White Sox received minor league pitchers Simon Castro, a right-hander, and Pedro Hernandez, a left-hander.

"San Diego came back and obviously put something on the table that attracted us," White Sox GM Ken Williams said. "Both of these guys are guys that we can ultimately see, and we can see them very quickly here."

Castro went 7-8 with a 5.63 ERA in 22 starts between Double-A San Antonio and Triple-A Tucson last season.

"He will be the first to admit that last year he did not distinguish himself amongst some of his peers that were also considered top prospects at the time," Williams said. "We've got to get him back there. Just one year ago you wouldn't have been able to get this type of guy."

Williams said Dayan Viciedo goes into spring training as Chicago's starting right fielder.

On Dec. 17, Byrnes dealt right-hander Mat Latos to the Cincinnati Reds for four players, including starter Edinson Volquez and Yonder Alonso, the leading contender to start at first base.

The two moves reverse a recent Padres trend of dealing big leaguers for prospects and shedding salary. Byrnes said the Padres were able to make these deals because his predecessor, Jed Hoyer, did a good job of acquiring prospects over the previous two years before he left to become GM of the Chicago Cubs.

"Talking to (CEO) Jeff Moorad, if we had ways to stretch our payroll, get the right guys to be competitive in 2012, maybe be a surprise team in 2012, and with that foundation that gives us a chance at real sustained success for a number of years, that's the ideal," Byrnes said.

While GM of the Diamondbacks, Byrnes traded Quentin to the White Sox for minor league first baseman Chris Carter in December 2007. The Diamondbacks had taken Quentin in the first round of the 2003 amateur draft after he helped Stanford reach the College World Series three straight times.

Byrnes said the Diamondbacks had a surplus of outfielders in 2007 and moving Quentin helped build a trade package for Dan Haren, who was obtained from Oakland 11 days after Quentin was traded to Chicago. Carter was one of six players Arizona sent to Oakland in the Haren deal.

"My real regret is really how much over time we missed his intensity," said Byrnes, who oversaw an NL West title in 2007 with Arizona, but was fired in July 2010. "A group that had success and now failure and now success, could have used his personality around a little bit."

A shoulder injury limited Quentin to just one game in the final month of 2011, but Byrnes said the outfielder is healthy.

The 29-year-old Quentin hit .254 with 24 home runs, a career-high 31 doubles and 77 RBIs in 118 games in 2011, when he made his second All-Star team.

In 2008, he made his first All-Star team, won the Silver Slugger award and finished in the top five of AL Most Valuable Player voting.

Quentin has heard the talk about how spacious Petco Park eats up fly balls, but isn't worried.

"I was here when the park was first built and I'm familiar with it. I played in it. I'm fortunate to have the size physically and be able to be successful personally. I've always had the approach of hitting first and staying within myself. I've found that to be most ideal to produce power. I'm not planning on changing that at all. I'll become familiar with the ballpark."

Byrnes thinks Quentin will be OK.

"He's got huge power, so he has hit a good number of homers to right, right-center," the GM said. "It's a tall order for any player in Petco, but from center to the left-field foul pole, they're gone in any park. ... Since we play half our games on the road, he'll be a real threat. When we were down two or three runs, we didn't have enough of a threat in the lineup. We feel Carlos will bring that."

The Padres hit the fewest homers in the majors (91); had the lowest batting average in the NL (.237); the second-highest strikeout total in the majors (1,320); and scored only 593 runs, second-lowest in the NL last season.

Quentin attended grade school in suburban Chula Vista and was a three-sport standout at University of San Diego High. He was chosen San Diego's Male Athlete of the Year in 2000.

He was a finalist for the Golden Spikes Award during his last college season, 2003.

Mayweather completes plea deal in Vegas

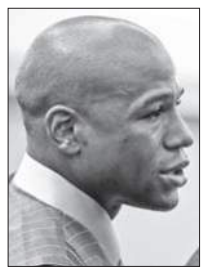
LAS VEGAS (AP)— Attorneys for boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr. completed the second part of a plea deal Friday that let the championship fighter pay a $1,000 fine and avoid trial and jail time for a November 2010 scuffle with a homeowner association security guard in an argument about parking tickets.

Mayweather, 34, didn't appear in person before Las Vegas Justice of the Peace Janiece Marshall while his lawyer, Karen Winckler, pleaded no contest on his behalf to misdemeanor battery and said the fine had been paid.

The plea acknowledged allegations that Mayweather poked the 21-year-old guard in the face several times with his finger during their argument in front of Mayweather's million-dollar-plus home in an exclusive gated community several miles south of the Las Vegas Strip.

Mayweather is scheduled to start a 90-day jail sentence Jan. 6 in an unrelated case, which raises doubts about a long-anticipated fight between Mayweather and Philippine fight rival Manny Pacquiao.

He pleaded guilty Dec. 21 to misdemeanor battery domestic violence and no contest to harassment for a hair-pulling, punching and arm-twisting argument with his ex-girlfriend, Josie Harris, while two of their children, ages 9 and 10, watched in September 2010 at the woman's home.


Mayweather

Mayweather spent two nights at the Clark County jail in downtown Las Vegas after an arrest in the domestic violence case and one night in jail after the poking incident.

Mayweather's lawyers have said they may ask the judge who sentenced Mayweather in the domestic violence case to reconsider the 90-day jail term, but Winckler declined comment after Friday's hearing for the other case.

Judge Melissa Saragosa sentenced Mayweather to six months in the Clark County jail but suspended half the term. She gave him credit for three days previously served and ordered him to complete 100 hours of community service, pay a $2,500 fine and complete a yearlong domestic violence counseling program.

The plea allowed Mayweather to avoid a trial on felony and misdemeanor charges that could have gotten him 34 years in state prison if he had been convicted on all counts.

Police said good behavior could reduce Mayweather's jail term sentence by several weeks. But his time behind bars will likely cut into training time for a May 5 date that Mayweather's promoters have reserved for a bout against an as-yet unnamed opponent at the MGM Grand Garden Arena.

Mayweather and Pacquiao have a defamation lawsuit pending in federal court in Las Vegas stemming from statements by Mayweather that he suspects Pacquiao took performance-enhancing drugs.

Mayweather is also on the hook to complete 40 hours of community service by Jan. 31 with the Las Vegas Habitat for Humanity Project under a South Carolina federal judge's order for dodging a deposition in a music rights lawsuit.

And he faces a civil lawsuit in Las Vegas from two men who allege he orchestrated a shooting attack on them outside a skating rink in 2009. Police have never accused Mayweather of firing shots and he has never been criminally charged in the case.

SHIRLEY'S

From Page 28

In six matches in the regular season, Shirley's FC scored 38 goals, the most in the field, and gave up only two goals. Paire recorded the second most goals with 22 and finished second with a 4-2-0 slate, while IFC was ranked third with its 1-1-3 card and five goals for and three goals against. MP United placed last with a 0-1-4 card and tallied the least goals in the group with two.

In the playoffs, Shirley's FC was pitted against the winless MP United and the top-ranked squad cruised past the latter in the semis, 13-0. In the other semis pairing, Independents pulled off an upset over the depleted Paire to set up a title showdown against Shirley's FC.

With the 2011 futsal championship on the line, Shirley's FC and Independents played a physical game early on and in the end, the former's much younger and faster crew prevailed against the veteran players of the latter.

Jeraldine Castillo started things out for Shirley's with her goal in the first two minutes of the match and seven minutes later, Lalaine Pagarao made it a 2-0 count. Then with only two minutes gone by in the second half, Marrielle Gariguez also found the back of the net for a big 3-0 advantage. Sarah Allen broke Independents' silence with a goal in the 32nd minute, but that was the best IFC could do in the finals.

Shirley's FC was later awarded the perpetually trophy, which Paire won in 2010. Shirley's joined the 2010 competition, too, but only played in the recreational league and failed to advance to the finals after losing to Matansa in the semifinals.

NETTERS

From Page 28

Lorish Puluspene of Papua New Guinea in the second round. Next up for Minor and Shannon is the Australian pair of Priscilla Dawson and Julia Stutsel and the last one is the tandem of New Caledonia's Assaya Trimari and Australia's Isabella Spring. The pair with the most wins after the round-robin competition takes the U16 doubles crown.

Ackerman will also compete in both singles and doubles events in the U12 age group. Her opening round assignment in the singles draw is against the host's Jasmin Ruby Starr. Ackerman will be battling the U12 singles title against 30 other players.

In the doubles event, 12-year-old Ackerman will join forces with Australia's Mercy Jane Eze and they will play against the Australian duo of Jenae Anne Bangweni and Jaslyn Zoe Skilbeck in the first round. Sixteen teams are entered in the U12 doubles.

The boys U16 singles has spots for 32 players and Miller will be fighting for one of the eight remaining tickets. Miller is at the bottom half of the 64-player qualifying draw and must win three games to make it to the main draw. His first match will be against Australia's Lachlan Anthony Shrimpton. If Miller survives the first round, he will collide against No. 8 seed Dominic Marquis.

In the boys U16 doubles, Miller and teammate Heve Kelly of Tahiti are in the main draw and they will duel Australia's Cameron Cole and Nathan Ponton in the first round.

In the tougher men's open singles field, Jones is at the top half of the 64-player qualifying draw and will go up against Conrad Lim of Australia in the first round. Jones will need a string of wins to advance to the main draw. In the men's doubles, he and partner Chris Hargrove are in the main draw and will be pitted against brothers Jack and Jamie Swindells.

Jones, Miller, Ackerman, and Minor are in Australia as members of the Oceania ITF Touring Team. They left Saipan Sunday morning and arrived in Melbourne yesterday afternoon. From Melbourne, they will travel to Albury to attend a two-day camp before competing in their first event in the Land Down Under.

Then from Albury, the group will head to Wodonga for the 2011 Victoria Junior Grasscourt Championships that will run from Jan. 11 to 15. The CNMI junior netters will then return to Melbourne to watch a couple of games in the 2012 Australian Open.

BUSY

From Page 28

man swim, triathletes are then invited to join the Seventh Day Adventist School-hosted MTB/road race at Paupau Beach.

From bikes, triathletes will switch to their running shoes for the Marianas Coffee Trail Run, which is set for Jan. 28 and will start and end at the American Memorial Park.

The second of a series of XTERRA/Tagaman Enticer will be held on Feb. 4, followed by the Northern Passage bike race on Feb. 12, XTERRA Trail Run 2 on Feb. 18, and the Saipan Swim Club Meek and Mighty Swim on Feb. 28.

For March, the first four events will be in preparation for the 2012 XTERRA Saipan Championship and Tagaman Triathlon. Topping the list is the Saipan Festival of Races, which will feature a marathon, half marathon, and 10K and will all be held on March 3.

The third and last XTERRA/Tagaman Enticer will follow next on March 10, while participants in the XTERRA and Tagaman will have a chance for a pre-ride of the courses on March 17 and 18, respectively.

Triathletes will have about a week of rest before they compete in the 2012 XTERRA Saipan Championship, which is scheduled for March 24. Then the last event for the first quarter of 2012 will be the Tagaman Triathlon (March 31).

Members of the sports community are encouraged to join the pre-XTERRA/Tagaman events, as all proceeds from these races will go to the two biggest triathlon competitions in the CNMI. Entrance fees for the Enticers and Tagaman swim and rides are only $5. Other events have their separate registration fees. For the SDA race, entrance fee is only $10, $30 for Coffee Trail, $20 for Northern Passage, and $55 for marathon, and $45 in the half marathon and 10K in the festival of runs.

Details of these races will be released as events near.

LITTLE

From Page 28

work for SLLBI's 30 current active members, finalizing the 2012 team rosters, and reviewing updated details about required background checks of members.

The deadline for managers, coaches, and umpires to submit all required paperwork is Jan. 15. Required forms have already been circulated in past meetings.

Tenorio said most of the 2012 team rosters are already formulated and just have to be officially submitted to Little League Baseball's head office in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

After local authorities carry out the required background checks, he said these documents will also be sent to the Little League head office where it will undergo verification process.

Since the SLLBI is a youth program, the board is trying to have the Department of Public Safety's background check fee of $15 per member waived.

In addition, the board is also currently obtaining liability forms and weighing possible insurance coverage options for players this season.

The board is also still waiting to receive copies of the new 2012 rulebook, however no significant rule changes have been announced from the Little League head office.

Moreover, the SLLBI will keep its membership drive open for any interested parent or volunteer that wants to get involved and help out during the upcoming season.

The membership drive will remain open until opening day, which is targeted for Feb. 15.

All parents are encouraged to come out and support the cause.

"We have about 600 kids total expected to turn out this year and we need all the help we can get, said Tenorio.

He added, "Our goal is to develop these kids into good players, while at the same time, build up their character and team-building skills. We aim to help promote a healthy and active lifestyle through youth baseball and keep these youngsters off the streets and deter them from using drugs ands alcohol."

As of now, Tenorio said the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios and Miguel "Tan Ge" Pangelinan ballfields are not available because the LG Twins, a professional baseball team from South Korea, is currently using the Oleai Sports Complex.

The LG Twins are here on island rehabilitating a group of about 30 bullpen and utility players.

Therefore, Tenorio said Dandan Elementary School and Koblerville Elementary School baseball fields may be used by the organization as substitute fields for some major division games if Tan Ge Field is not available.

He said Kan Pacific Field near Marianas Resort can also serve as a substitute field for the junior, senior, and big divisions, if needed.

The LG Twins are expected to finish their training session on either Feb. 1 or 16 at the latest.

For more information about the local Little League proggram, contact SLLBI president Juan I. Tenorio at 483-4836 or SLLBI secretary Peding Tenorio at 287-8091.

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NFL STANDINGS (FINAL)

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-New England	13	3	0	.813	513	342
N.Y. Jets	8	8	0	.500	377	363
Miami	6	10	0	.375	329	313
Buffalo	6	10	0	.375	372	434
South						
y-Houston	10	6	0	.625	381	278
Tennessee	9	7	0	.563	325	317
Jacksonville	5	11	0	.313	243	329
Indianapolis	2	14	0	.125	243	430
North						
y-Baltimore	12	4	0	.750	378	266
x-Pittsburgh	12	4	0	.750	325	227
x-Cincinnati	9	7	0	.563	344	323
Cleveland	4	12	0	.250	218	307
West						
y-Denver	8	8	0	.500	309	390
San Diego	8	8	0	.500	406	377
Oakland	8	8	0	.500	359	433
Kansas City	7	9	0	.438	212	338

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East

y-N.Y. Giants	9	7	0	.563	394	400
Philadelphia	8	8	0	.500	396	328
Dallas	8	8	0	.500	369	347
Washington	5	11	0	.313	288	367
South						
y-New Orleans	13	3	0	.813	547	339
x-Atlanta	10	6	0	.625	402	350
Carolina	6	10	0	.375	406	429
Tampa Bay	4	12	0	.250	287	494
North						
y-Green Bay	15	1	0	.938	560	359
x-Detroit	10	6	0	.625	474	387
Chicago	8	8	0	.500	353	341
Minnesota	3	13	0	.188	340	449
West						
y-San Francisco	13	3	0	.813	380	229
Arizona	8	8	0	.500	312	348
Seattle	7	9	0	.438	321	315
St. Louis	2	14	0	.125	193	407

x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division

Yesterdayís Games

Chicago 17, Minnesota 13
New Orleans 45, Carolina 17
Green Bay 45, Detroit 41
San Francisco 34, St. Louis 27
Tennessee 23, Houston 22
New England 49, Buffalo 21
Miami 19, N.Y. Jets 17
Jacksonville 19, Indianapolis 13
Philadelphia 34, Washington 10
San Diego 38, Oakland 26
Kansas City 7, Denver 3
Arizona 23, Seattle 20, OT
Atlanta 45, Tampa Bay 24
Baltimore 24, Cincinnati 16
Pittsburgh 13, Cleveland 9
N.Y. Giants 31, Dallas 14

NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	2	2	.500	—
Philadelphia	2	2	.500	—
Boston	2	3	.400	Ω
Toronto	1	3	.250	1
New Jersey	1	4	.200	1 1/2
Southeast Division				
Miami	5	0	1.000	—
Orlando	4	1	.800	1
Atlanta	3	1	.750	1 1/2
Charlotte	1	3	.250	3 1/2
Washington	0	4	.000	4 1/2
Central Division				
Chicago	4	1	.800	—
Indiana	3	1	.750	1/2
Milwaukee	2	1	.667	1
Cleveland	2	2	.500	1 1/2
Detroit	1	3	.250	2 1/2

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

San Antonio	3	1	.750	—
Houston	2	2	.500	1
New Orleans	2	2	.500	1
Memphis	1	3	.250	2
Dallas	1	4	.200	2 1/2
Northwest Division				
Oklahoma City	5	0	1.000	—
Portland	3	1	.750	1 1/2
Denver	3	2	.600	2
Minnesota	1	3	.250	3 1/2
Utah	1	3	.250	3 1/2
Pacific Division				
L.A. Clippers	2	2	.500	—
L.A. Lakers	3	3	.500	—
Golden State	2	2	.500	—
Sacramento	2	3	.400	1/2
Phoenix	1	3	.250	1

Yesterday's Games

Cleveland 98, New Jersey 82
Miami 129, Charlotte 90
Orlando 102, Toronto 96
Boston 94, Washington 86
Minnesota 99, Dallas 82
Denver 99, L.A. Lakers 90
Chicago 104, Memphis 64
Sacramento 96, New Orleans 80
L.A. Clippers 93, Portland 88

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

2011 NMIFA Women's Futsal Fall League

PHOTOS By ROSELYN B. MONROYO

The Independents goalie stops the ball for the save.

Players of Shirley's FC A pose with their perpetual trophy after beating Independents FC, 3-1, in the finals of the 2011 NMIFA Women's Futsal Fall League last week at the TSL Sports Complex.

Shirley's Irish Pagarao, right, tries to keep possession against an Independents defender during the second half of the finals.

An Independents player keeps the ball away from her defender.

Two Paire players battle one MHS striker for the ball.

A Paire strike saves the ball from going out of the sideline.

Independents' Sarah Allen, left, and Shirley's Irish Pagarao nudge each other.

Paire's Temary Gramlich in action during their game against MHS in the recreational division.

An Independents player (in green uniform) has possession of the ball.

Three Shirley's FC players form a wall while waiting for the penalty kick from Independents.

Anderson scores 24, Magic rally past Raptors

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Sports

Giants win NFC East, beat Cowboys, 31-14

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Shirley's FC a force in women's futsal

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Shirley's Football Club closed out the 2011 season with back-to-back futsal championships, making the team the group to watch this year.

Shirley's FC's recent conquest came in the 2011 NMIFA Women's Futsal Fall League where it defeated Independents FC in the finals, 3-1, last Wednesday to cap the season with a perfect record.

The champion team is composed of Marielle and Marilou Gariguez, Jeraldine and Jeralyn Castillo, Jhaneeka Atalig, Lalaine Pagarao, Melody Johnson, Alexa Vergara, Mikky Vargas, and Mae Angelie Ito. Majority of these players also suited up for Shirley's FC A, which also reigned supreme in the inaugural 2011 Saipan Soccer School Futsal League at the TSL Sports Complex.

Shirley's FC had an 11-3-0 win-loss-draw record in the SSS futsal league and then a few months later went 6-0 in the NMIFA competition. Shirley's swept Independents FC, Paire FC, and MP United in the double-round robin regular season to gain the top seeding in the playoffs.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Shirley's FC A's Melody Johnson, second left, steps up on defense to deflect the shot of Independents' Mel Borja during the second half of their title game in the women's futsal fall league last week at the TSL Sports Complex.

See **SHIRLEY'S** on **Page 26**

Little League gearing up for new season

By WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
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REPORTER

The island's Little League program is gearing up for a successful 2012 season and has set an organizational meeting next week.

Saipan Little League Inc.'s board of directors, led by president Juan I. Tenorio, is calling on all stakeholders of the program to attend a meeting next Wednesday, Jan. 11, 5:30pm at the pavilion behind the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium.

Tenorio

Tenorio said topics on the agenda include finalizing the official membership paper-

See LITTLE on **Page 26**

Ackerman

Miller

Jones

Minor

IN TOURNEY IN LAND DOWN UNDER

Netters get mixed fortunes in draw

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

The four CNMI junior tennis players competing in the 2012 Australia Post Margaret Court Cup had mixed fortunes in their first tournament in Australia this year.

Thea Minor and Tammy Ackerman made it to the main draw of their respective events, while Christian Miller and Rafael Jones must go through qualifying tournaments before advancing to the main field. The qualifying games at the Albury Tennis Courts in Albury, New South Wales, will be played on Thursday, while matches in the main draw will run from Jan. 6 to 10.

Minor is entered in both the girls U16 singles and doubles. She will collide with Australia's Sarah Mitchell in the first round of the singles contest, which features 16 players.

In the doubles event, only five pairs made the list, including Minor and teammate Annie Shannon of Fiji. Minor and Shannon will first face Australia's Marta Brzozowska and Lauren Smileski and then meet Alesi Molotii of Tuvalu and

See NETTERS on **Page 26**

Busy first quarter for triatheletes

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

The islands' triathletes will have their hands full in the opening quarter of 2012 as 15 events are lined up in the first three months of the year.

First up for members of the triathlon community is the XTERRA/Tagaman Enticer 1, which will be held this Saturday Start/finish line and race time will be announced before the weekend event kicks off.

Then on Jan. 14, the XTERRA Trail Run 1 will take place, followed by the Tagaman Swim on Jan. 21. A day after the Taga-

See BUSY on **Page 26**

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

CNMI's Jeff Race, and Switzerland's Renata Bucher sprint to the finish line of last year's Tagaman Triathlon. A series of races are scheduled in the first quarter of 2012 in preparation for Tagaman and XTERRA Saipan.